NOVEMBER 1959

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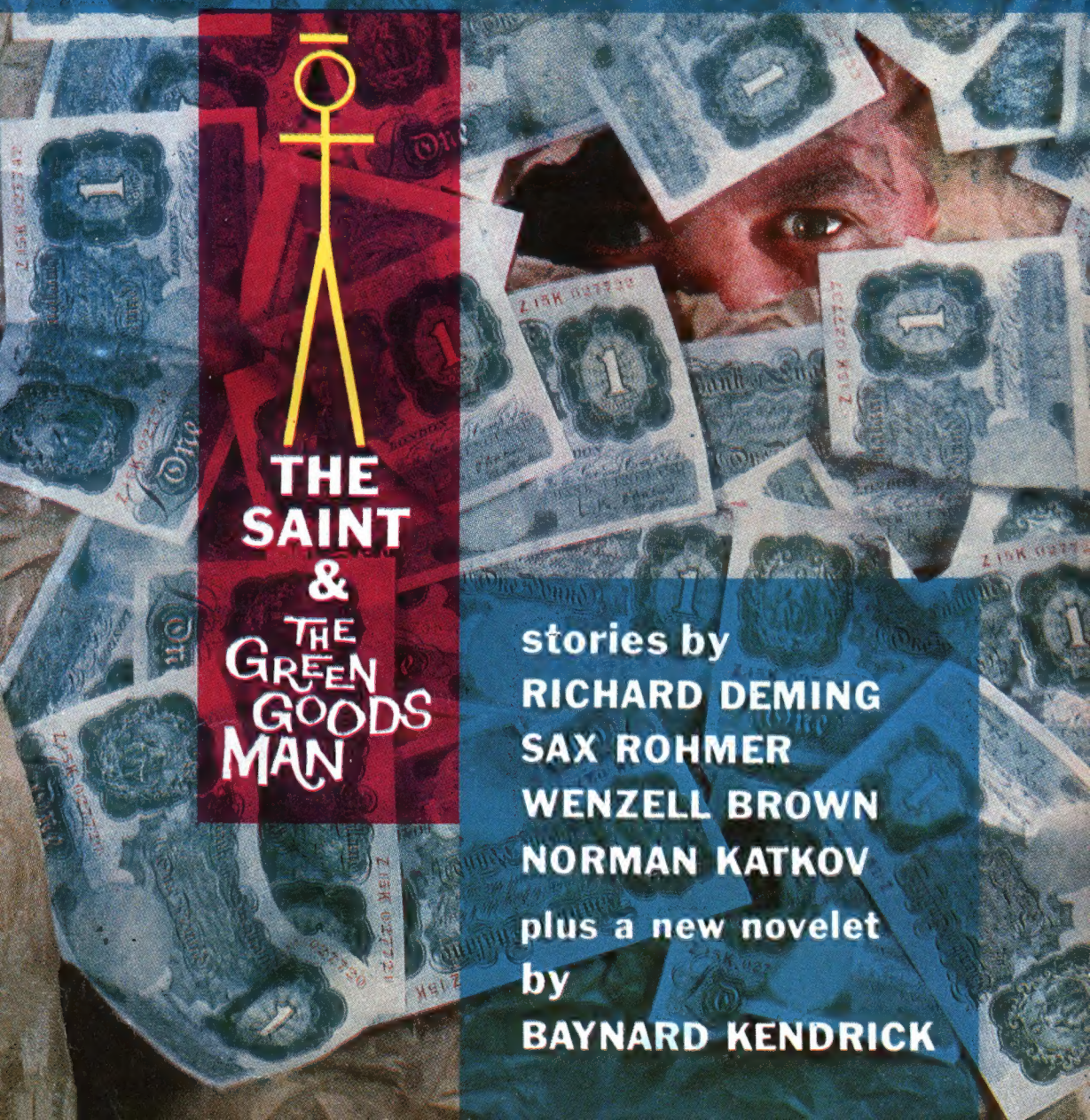
THE saint®

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

edited by
LESLIE CHARTERIS



THE SAINT & THE GREEN GOODS MAN

stories by
RICHARD DEMING
SAX ROHMER
WENZELL BROWN
NORMAN KATKOV
plus a new novelet
by
BAYNARD KENDRICK

SHORTLY AFTER we switched, to bring some variety to a very limited subject, from the diagram of my illustrious dial which for this month only we bring back to the upper corner of this page, we heard from a Mrs. Jennie Stingley of Akron, Colorado, as follows:

Thanks for the new likeness in June number. I don't know if it is more like you... But it is a relief not to see that smear *on your lip. I was born in* 1881, *so grew up during the* 90's, *when mustaches were mustaches.*

Leaving you other readers for the moment to debate whether this slur on a growth to which I had become greatly attached is justified, I am personally fortified in introducing this issue by the presence of Baynard Kendrick with a brand-new Stan Rice Story, WHIPSAW. Some of you will remember how in publishing other Kendrick stories I wished aloud that we could reprint one of those early Stan Rice yarns from *Black Mask*, and then how we finally found and brought you one; but I never hoped at the time that Baynard could be persuaded to do a new story on the character through whom I first met him and through whose adventures I first felt the fascination of the State where I now make my home. But, as perhaps all things come to Editors who wait, it has happened at last, and provides another landmark of which I feel vicariously proud.

This happy event, however, has not stopped us overloading this number with a new story by Richard Deming, supported by Wenzell Brown's unusual reportage on GOD'S UGLY BRIDE, to go with another of Sax Rohmer's *Tales of Secret Egypt.*

THE GREEN GOODS MAN is, of course, the regular contribution by your faithful Supervising Ed., who wonders how many friends and readers will prefer him with the 1890 type fungus which he is modeling on your lower left.

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THE saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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HENRY SCHARF
Publisher

LESLIE CHARTERIS
Supervising Editor

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON
Editorial Director

J. WILLIAM LUSZCZ
Art Director

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THE SAINT & THE GREEN GOODS MAN

"THE SECRET of contentment," said Simon Templar oratorically, "is to take things as they come. As is the daily office-work of the City hog in his top hat to the moments when he signs his supreme mergers, so are the bread-and-butter exploits of a pirate to his great adventures. After all, one can't always be ploughing through thrilling escapes and captures with guns popping in all directions; but there are always people who'll give you money. You don't even have to look for them. You just put on a monocle and the right expression of half-wittedness, and they come up and tip their purses into your lap."

He offered this pearl of thought for the approval of his usual audience; and it is a regrettable fact that neither of them disputed his philosophy. Patricia Holm knew him too well; and even Peter Quentin had by that time walked in the ways of Saintly lawlessness long enough to know that such pronouncements inevitably heralded another of the bread-and-butter exploits referred to. It wasn't, of course, strictly true that Simon Templar was in need of bread and butter; but he liked jam with it, and a generous world had always p r o v i d e d him abundantly with both.

Benny Lucek came over from New York on a falling market to try his luck in the Old World. He had half-a-dozen natty suits which fitted him so well that he always looked as if he would have burst open from his wrists to his hips if his blood-pressure had risen two degrees, he had a selection of mauve and pink silk shirts in his wardrobe trunk, pointed and beautifully polished shoes for his feet, a pearl pin for his tie, and no less than three rings for his fingers. His features radiated honesty, candor, and good humor; and as a stock-in-trade those gifts alone were worth several figures of solid cash to him in any state of the market.

Also he still had a good deal of capital, without which no Green Goods man can even begin to operate.

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER.
Copyright 1933 by Leslie Charteris.

Benny Lucek was one of the last great exponents of that gentle graft; and although they had been telling him in New York that the game was played out, he had roseate hopes of finding virgin soil for a new crop of successes among the benighted *bourgeoisie* of Europe. So far as he knew, the Green Goods ground had scarcely been touched on the eastern side of the Atlantic, and Benny had come across to look it over. He installed himself in a comfortable suite on the third floor of the Park Lane Hotel, changed his capital into English bank-notes, and sent out his feelers into space.

In the most popular Personal Columns appeared temptingly-worded advertisements of which the one that Simon Templar saw was a fair specimen.

ANY LADY or GENTLEMAN in reduced circumstances, who would be interested in an enterprise showing GREAT PROFITS for a NEGLIGIBLE RISK, should write in STRICT CONFIDENCE, giving some personal information, to Box No. —

Benny Lucek knew everything there was to know about letters. He was a practical graphologist of great astuteness, and a deductive psychologist of vast experience. Given a two-page letter which on the surface conveyed the vaguest particulars about the writer, he could build up in his mind a character study with a complete background filled in that fitted his subject without a wrinkle ninety-nine times out of a hundred; and if the mental picture he formed of a certain Mr. Tombs, whose reply to that advertisement was included among several scores of others, was one of the hundredth times, it might not have been entirely Benny's fault. Simon Templar was also a specialist in letters, although his art was creative instead of critical.

Patricia came in one morning and found him performing another creative feat at which he was no less adept.

"What on earth are you doing in those clothes?" she asked, when she had looked at him.

Simon glanced over himself in the mirror. His dark blue suit was neat but unassuming, and had a well-worn air as if it were the only one he possessed and had been cared for with desperate pride. His shoes were old and strenuously polished; his socks dark gray and woolen, carefully darned. He wore a cheap pin-striped poplin shirt, and a stiff white collar without one saving grace of line. His tie was dark blue, like his suit, and rather stringy. Across his waistcoat hung an oldfashioned silver watch chain. Anything less like the Simon Templar of normal times, who always somehow infused into the suits of Savile Row a flamboyant personality of his own, and whose shirts and socks and ties were the envy of the young men who drank with him in a few clubs which he belonged to, it would have been almost impossible to imagine.

"I am a hard-working clerk in an insurance office, earning three hundred a year with the dim prospect of rising to three hundred and fifty in another fifteen years, age about forty, with an anaemic wife and seven children and a semi-detached house at Streatham." He was fingering his face speculatively, staring at it in the glass. "A little too beautiful for the part at present, I think; but we'll soon put that right."

He set to work on his face with the quick unhesitating touches of which he was such an amazing master. His eyebrows, brushed in towards his nose, turned grey and bushy; his hair also turned grey, and was plastered down to his skull so skilfully that it seemed inevitable that any barber he went to would remark that he was running a little thin on top. Under the movements of his swift fingers, cunning shadows appeared at the sides of his forehead, under his eyes, and around his chin—shadows so faint that even at a yard's range their artificiality could not have been detected, and yet so cleverly placed that they seemed to change the whole shape and expression of his face. And while he worked he talked.

"If you ever read a storybook, Pat, in which anyone disguises himself as someone else so perfectly that the impersonated bloke's own

friends and secretaries and servants are taken in, you'll know there's an author who's cheating on you. On the stage it might be done up to a point; but in real life, where everything you put on has got to get by in broad daylight and close-ups, it's impossible. I," said the Saint unblushingly, "am the greatest character actor that never went on the stage, and I know. But when it comes to inventing a new character of your own that mustn't be recognised again—then you can do things."

He turned around suddenly, and she gasped. He was perfect. His shoulders were rounded and stooping; his head was bent slightly forward, as if set in that position by years of poring over ledgers. And he gazed at her with the dumb passionless expression of his part—an under-nourished, under-exercised, middleaged man without hopes or ambitions, permanently worried, crushed out of pleasure by the wanton taxation which goes to see that the paladins of Whitehall are never deprived of an afternoon's golf, utterly resigned to the somber purposelessness of his existence, scraping and pinching through fifty weeks in the year in order to let himself be stodgily swindled at the seaside for a fortnight in August, solemnly discussing the antics of politicians as if they really mattered and honestly believing that their cow-like utterances might do something to alleviate his burdens, holding a crumbling country together with his own dour stoicism and the stoicism of millions of his own kind....

"Will I do?" he asked.

From Benny Lucek's point of view he could scarcely have done better. Benny's keen eyes absorbed the whole atmosphere of him in one calculating glance that took in every detail from the gray hair that was running a little thin on top down to the strenuously polished shoes.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Tombs. Come along and have a cocktail—I expect you could do with one."

He led his guest into the sumptuous lounge, and Mr. Tombs sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair. It is impossible to refer to that man

of the Saint's creation as anything but "Mr. Tombs"—the Simon Templar whom Patricia knew might never have existed inside that stoical stoop-shouldered frame.

"Er—a glass of sherry, perhaps," he said.

Benny ordered Dry Sack, and knew that the only sherry Mr. Tombs had ever tasted before came from the nearest grocer. But he was an expert at putting strangers at their ease, and the Simon Templar who stood invisibly behind Mr. Tombs' chair had to admire his technique. He chattered away with a disarming lack of condescension that presently had Mr. Tombs leaning back and chuckling with him, and ordering a return round of Dry Sack with the feeling that he had at last met a successful man who really understood and appreciated him. They went in to lunch with Benny roaring with infectious laughter over a vintage Stock Exchange story which Mr. Tombs had dug out of his memory.

"Smoked salmon, Mr. Tombs? Or a spot of caviar?... Then we might have *oeufs en cocotte Rossini*—done in cream with *foie gras* and truffles. And roast pigeons with mushrooms and red currant jelly. I like a light meal in the middle of the day—it doesn't make you sleepy all the afternoon. And a bottle of Liebfraumilch off the ice to go with it?"

He ran through menu and wine list with an engaging expertness which somehow made Mr. Tombs an equal partner in the exercise of gastronomic virtuosity. And Mr. Tombs, whose imagination had rarely soared above roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and a bottle of Australian burgundy, thawed still further and recalled another story that had provoked howls of laughter in Threadneedle Street when he was in his twenties.

Benny did his work so well that the sordid business aspect of their meeting never had a chance to obtrude itself during the meal; and yet he managed to find out everything he wanted to know about his guest's private life and opinions. Liquefying helplessly in the genial warmth of Benny's hospitality, Mr. Tombs became almost human. And Benny drew him on with unhurried mastery.

"I've always thought that insurance must be an interesting profession, Mr. Tombs. You've got to be pretty wide awake for it, too—I expect you always have clients who expect to take more out of you than they put in?"

Mr. Tombs, who had never found his job interesting, and who would never have detected an attempted fraud unless another department had pointed it out to him, smiled noncommittally.

"That kind of mixed morality has always interested me," said Benny, as if the point had only just occurred to him. "A man who wouldn't steal a sixpence from a man he met in the street hasn't any objection to stealing half-crowns from the Government by cutting down his income tax return or smuggling home a bottle of brandy when he comes across from France. If he's looking for a partner in business he wouldn't dream of putting a false value on his assets; but if his house is burgled he doesn't mind what value he puts on his things when he's making out his insurance claim."

Mr. Tombs shrugged.

"I suppose Governments and wealthy public companies are considered fair game," he hazarded.

"Well, probably there's a certain amount of lawlessness in the best of us," admitted Benny. "I've often wondered what I should do myself in certain circumstances. Suppose, for instance, you were going home in a taxi one night, and you found a wallet on the seat with a thousand pounds in it. Small notes that you could easily change. No name inside to show who the owner was. Wouldn't one be tempted to keep it?"

Mr. Tombs twiddled a fork, hesitating only for a second or two. But the Simon Templar who stood behind his chair knew that that was the question on which Benny Lucek's future hung—the point that had been so casually and skillfully led up to, which would finally settle whether "Mr. Tombs" was the kind of man Benny wanted to meet. And yet there was no trace of anxiety or watchfulness in Benny's frank open face. Benny tilted the last of the Liebfraumilch into Mr. Tombs' glass, and Mr. Tombs looked up.

"I suppose I should. It

sounds dishonest, but I was trying to put myself in the position to begin faced with the temptation, instead of theorising about it. Face to face with a thousand pounds in cash, and needing money to take my wife abroad, I might easily—er—succumb. Not that I mean to imply—"

"My dear fellow, I'm not going to blame you," said Benny heartily. "I'd do the same thing myself. I'd reason it out that a man who carried a thousand pounds in cash about with him had plenty more in the bank. It's the old story of fair game. We may be governed by plenty of laws, but our consciences are still very primitive when we've no fear of being caught."

There was a silence after that, in which Mr. Tombs finished his last angel on horseback, mopped the plate furtively with the last scrap of toast, and accepted a cigarette from Benny's platinum case. The pause gave him his first chance to remember that he was meeting the sympathetic Mr. Lucek in order to hear about a business proposition—as Benny intended that it should. As a waiter approached with the bill, Mr. Tombs said t e n t a t i v e l y: "About your—um—advertisement—"

Benny scrawled his signature across the account, and pushed back his chair.

"Come up to my sitting-room and we'll talk about it."

They went up in the lift, with Benny unconcernedly puffing Turkish cigarette-smoke, and down an expensively carpeted corridor. Benny had an instinctive sense of dramatic values. Without saying anything, and yet at the same time without giving the impression that he was being intentionally reticent, he opened the door of his suite and ushered Mr. Tombs in.

The sitting-room was small but cosily furnished. A large carelessly-opened brown paper parcel littered the table in the centre, and there was a similar amount of litter in one of the chairs. Benny picked up an armful of it and dumped it on the floor in the corner.

"Know what these things are?" he asked off-handedly.

He took up a handful of the litter that remained on the chair and thrust it under

Mr. Tombs' nose. It was generally green in colour; as Mr. Tombs blinked at it, words and patterns took shape on it, and he blinked still harder.

"Pound notes," said Benny. He pointed to the pile he had dumped in the corner. "More of 'em." He flattened the brown paper around the carelessly-opened parcel on the table, revealing neat stacks of treasure packed in thick uniform bundles. "Any amount of it. Help yourself."

Mr. Tombs' blue eyes went wider and wider, with the lids blinking over them rapidly as if to dispel a hallucination.

"Are they—are they really all pound notes?"

"Every one of 'em."

"All yours?"

"I guess so. I made 'em, anyway."

"There must be thousands."

Benny flung himself into the cleared armchair.

"I'm about the richest man in the world, Mr. Tombs," he said. "I guess I must be *the* richest, because I can make money as fast as I can turn a handle. I meant exactly what I said to you just now. I *made* those notes!"

Mr. Tombs touched the pile with his finger tips, as if he half expected them to bite him. His eyes were rounder and wider than ever.

"You don't mean—*forgeries?*" he whispered.

"I don't," said Benny. "Take those notes to the nearest bank—tell the cashier you have your doubts about them—and ask him to look them over. Take 'em to the Bank of England. There isn't a forgery in the whole lot—but I made 'em! Sit down and I'll tell you."

Mr. Tombs sat down, stiffly. His eyes kept straying back to the heaps of wealth on the floor and the table, as though at each glance he would have been relieved rather than surprised if they had vanished.

"It's like this, Mr. Tombs. I'm taking you into my confidence because I've known you a couple of hours and I've made up my mind about you. I like you. Those notes, Mr. Tombs, were printed from a proof plate that was stolen out of the Bank of England itself by a fellow who worked there. He was in the engraving department, and when they were making

the plates they made one more than they needed. It was given to him to destroy—and he didn't destroy it. He was like the man we were talking about—the man in the taxi. He had a genuine plate that would print genuine pound notes, and he could keep it for himself if he wanted to. All he had to do was to make an imitation plate that no one was going to examine closely—you can't tell a lot from a plate, just looking at it—and cut a couple of lines across it to cancel it. Then that would be locked up in the vaults and probably never looked at again, and he'd have the real one. He didn't even know quite what he'd do with the plate when he had it, but he kept it. And then he got scared about it being found out, and he ran away. He went over to New York, where I come from.

"He stopped in the place I lived at, over in Brooklyn. I got to know him a bit, though he was always very quiet and seemed to have something on his mind. I didn't ask what it was, and I didn't care. Then he got pneumonia.

"Nobody else had ever paid any attention to him, so it seemed to be up to me. I did what I could for him—it didn't amount to much, but he appreciated it. I paid some of the rent he owed. The doctor found he was half starved—he'd landed in New York with just a few pounds, and when those were gone he'd lived on the leavings he could beg from chop houses. He was starving himself to death with a million pounds in his grip! But I didn't know that then. He got worse and worse; and then they had to give him oxygen one night, but the doctor said he wouldn't see the morning anyhow. He'd starved himself till he was too weak to get well again.

"He came to just before the end, and I was with him. He just looked at me and said: 'Thanks, Benny.' And then he told me all about himself and what he'd done. 'You keep the plate,' he said. 'It may be some good to you.'

"Well, he died in the morning, and the landlady told me to hurry up and get his things out of the way as there was another lodger coming in. I took 'em off to my own room. There wasn't much;

but I found the plate.

"Maybe you can imagine what it meant to me, after I'd got it all figured out. I was just an odd-job man in a garage then, earning a few dollars a week. I was the man in the taxi again. But I had a few dollars saved up: I'd have to find the right paper, and get the notes printed—I didn't know anything about the technical side of it. It'd cost money; but if it went through all right that poor fellow's legacy would make me a millionaire. He'd starved to death because he was too scared to try it; had *I* got the guts?"

Benny Lucek closed his eyes momentarily, as if he were reliving the struggle with his conscience.

"You can see for yourself which way I decided," he said. "It took time and patience, but it was still the quickest way of making a million I'd ever heard of. That was six years ago. I don't know how much money I've got in the bank now, but I know it's more than I can ever spend. And it was like that all of three years ago.

"And then I started thinking about the other people who needed money, and I began to square my conscience by helping them. I was working over in the States then, of course, changing this English money in small packets at banks all over the continent. And I started giving it away—charities, down-and-outs, any good thing I could think of. That was all right so far as it went. But then I started thinking, that fellow who gave me the plate was English, and some of the money ought to go back to people in England who needed it. That's why I came across. Did I tell you that fellow left a wife behind when he ran away? It took me two months to find her, with the best agents I could buy; but I located her at last serving in a tea-shop, and now I've set her on her feet for life, though she thinks it was an uncle she never had who died and left her the money. But if I can find any other fellow whose wife needs some money he can't earn for her," said Benny nobly, "I want to help him too."

Mr. Tombs swallowed. Benny Lucek was a master of elocution among his other

talents, and the manner of his recital was calculated to bring a lump into the throat of an impressionable listener.

"Would you like some money, Mr. Tombs?" he inquired.

Mr. Tombs coughed.

"I—er—well—I can't quite get over the story you've told me."

He picked up a handful of the notes, peered at them minutely, screwed them in his fingers, and put them down again rather abruptly and experimentally, as if he were trying to discover whether putting temptation from him would bring a glow of conscious virtue that would compensate for the worldly loss. Apparently the experiment was not very satisfactory, for his mouth puckered wistfully.

"You've told me all about yourself," said Benny, "and about your wife being delicate and needing to go away for a long sea voyage. I expect there's trouble about getting your children a proper education that you haven't mentioned at all. You're welcome to put all that right. You can buy just as many of those notes as you like, and twenty pounds per hundred is the price to you. That's exactly what they cost me in getting the special paper and inks and having them printed—the man I found to print 'em for me gets a big rake-off, of course. Four shillings each is the cost price, and you can make yourself a millionaire if you want to."

Mr. Tombs gulped audibly.

"You're—you're not pulling my leg, are you?" he stammered pathetically.

"Of course I'm not. I'm glad to do it." Benny stood up and placed one hand affectionately on Mr. Tombs' shoulders. "Look here, I know all this must have been a shock to you. It wants a bit of getting used to. Why don't you go away and think it over? Come and have lunch with me again tomorrow, if you want some of these notes, and bring the money with you to pay for them. Call me at seven o'clock and let me know if I'm to expect you." He picked up a small handful of money and stuffed it into Mr. Tombs' pocket. "Here—take some samples with you and try them on a bank, just in case you still can't believe it."

Mr. Tombs nodded, blinking.

"I'm the man in the taxi again," he said with a weak smile. "When you really do find the wallet—"

"Who loses by it?" asked Benny, with gently persuasive rhetoric. "The Bank of England, eventually. I never learnt any economics, but I suppose they'll have to meet the bill. But are they going to be any the worse off for the few thousands you'll take out of them? Why, it won't mean any more to them than a penny does to you now. Think it over."

"I will," said Mr. Tombs, with a last lingering stare at the littered table.

"There's just one other thing," said Benny. "Not a word of what I've told you to any living soul—not even to your wife. I'm trusting you to treat it as confidentially as you'd treat anything in your insurance business. You can see why, can't you? A story like I've told you would spread like wildfire, and once it got to the Bank of England there'd be no more money in it. They'd change the design of their notes and call in all the old ones as quick as I can say it."

"I understand, Mr. Lucek," said Mr. Tombs.

He understood perfectly—so well that the rapturous tale he told to Patricia Holm when he returned was almost incoherent. He told her while he was removing his make-up and changing back into his ordinary clothes; and when he had finished he was as immaculate and debonair as she had ever seen him. And finally he smoothed out the notes that Benny had given him at parting, and s t o w e d them carefully in his wallet. He looked at his watch.

"Let's go and see a show, darling," he said, "and then we'll buy a pailful of caviar between us and swill it down with a gallon of Bollinger. Brother Benjamin will pay!"

"But are you sure these notes are perfect?" she asked; and the Saint laughed.

"My sweetheart, every one of those notes was printed by the Bank of England itself. The green goods game is nothing like that; though I've often wondered why it hasn't been worked before in this—*Gott in Himmel!*"

Simon Templar suddenly leapt into the air with a yell;

and the startled girl stared at him.

"What in the name of—"

"Just an idea," explained the Saint. "They sometimes take me in the seat of the pants like that. This is rather a beauty."

He swept her off boisterously to the promised celebrations without telling her what the idea was that had made him spring like a young ram with loud foreign oaths; but at seven o'clock punctually he found time to telephone the Park Lane Hotel.

"I'm going to do what the man in the taxi would do, Mr. Lucek," he said.

"Well, Mr. Tombs, that's splendid news," responded Benny. "I'll expect you at one. By the way, how much will you be taking?"

"I'm afraid I can only manage to—um—raise three hundred pounds. That will buy fifteen hundred pounds' worth, won't it?"

"I'll make it two thousand pounds' worth to you, Mr. Tombs," said Benny generously. "I'll have it all ready for you when you come."

Mr. Tombs presented himself at five minutes to one, and although he wore the same suit of clothes as he had worn the previous day, there was a festive air about him to which a brand-new pair of white kid gloves and a carnation in his buttonhole colorfully contributed.

"I handed in my resignation at the office this morning," he said. "And I hope I never see the place again."

Benny was congratulatory but apologetic.

"I'm afraid we shall have to postpone our lunch," he said. "I've been investigating a lady who also answered my advertisement—a poor old widow living up in Derbyshire. Her husband deserted her twenty years ago; and her only son, who's been keeping her ever since, was killed in a motor accident yesterday. It seems as if she needs a fairy godfather quickly, and I'm going to dash up to Derbyshire and see what I can do."

Mr. Tombs suppressed a perfunctory tear, and accompanied Benny to his suite. A couple of well-worn suitcases and a wardrobe trunk the size of a suburban villa, all ready stacked up and labelled, confirmed Benny's avowed intentions. Only one of the parcels

of currency was visible, pushed untidily to one end of the table.

"Did you bring the money, Mr. Tombs?"

Mr. Tombs took out his battered wallet and drew forth a sheaf of crisp new fivers with slightly unsteady hands. Benny took them, glanced over them casually, and dropped them on to the table with the carelessness befitting a millionaire. He waved Mr. Tombs into an armchair with his back to the window, and himself sat down in a chair drawn up to the opposite side of the table.

"Two thousand one-pound notes are quite a lot to put in your pocket," he remarked. "I'll make them up into a parcel for you."

Under Mr. Tombs' yearning eyes he flipped off the four top bundles from the pile and tossed them one by one into his guest's lap. Mr. Tombs grabbed them and examined them hungrily, spraying the edges of each pack off his thumb so that pound notes whirred before his vision like the pictures on a toy cinematograph.

"You can count them if you like—there ought to be five hundred in each pack," said Benny; but Mr. Tombs shook his head.

"I'll take your word for it, Mr. Lucek. I can see they're all one-pound notes, and there must be a lot of them."

Benny smiled and held out his hand with a businesslike air. Mr. Tombs passed the bundles back to him, and Benny sat down again and arranged them in a neat cube on top of a sheet of brown paper. He turned the paper over the top and creased it down at the open ends with a rapid efficiency that would have done credit to any professional shop assistant; and Mr. Tombs' covetous eyes watched every movement with the intentness of a dumb but earnest audience trying to spot how a conjuring trick is done.

"Don't you think it would be a ghastly tragedy for a poor widow who put all her savings into these notes and then found that she had been —um—deceived?" said Mr. Tombs morbidly; and Benny's dark eyes switched up to his face in sudden startlement.

"Eh?" said Benny. "What's that?"

But Mr. Tombs' careworn face had the innocence of a patient sheep's.

"Just something I was thinking, Mr. Lucek," he said.

Benny grinned his expansive display of pearly teeth, and continued with his packing. Mr. Tombs' gaze continued to concentrate on him with an almost mesmeric effect; but Benny was not disturbed. He had spent nearly an hour that morning making and testing his preparations. The upper sash-cords of the window behind Mr. Tombs' chair had been cut through all but the last thread, and the weight of the sash was carried on a small steel peg driven into the frame. From the steel peg a thin but very strong dark-colored string ran down to the floor, pulleyed round a nail driven into the base of the wainscoting, and disappeared under the carpet; it pulleyed round another nail driven into the floor under the table, and came up through a hole in the carpet alongside one leg to loop conveniently over the handle of the drawer.

Benny completed the knots around his p a r c e l, and searched around for something to trim off the loose ends.

"T h e r e you are, Mr. Tombs," he said; and then, in his fumbling, he caught the convenient loop of string and tugged at it. The window fell with a crash.

And Mr. Tombs did not look around.

It was the most flabbergasting thing that had ever happened in Benny Lucek's experience. It was supernatural—incredible. It was a phenomenon so astounding that Benny's mouth fell open involuntarily, while a balloon of incredulous stupefaction bulged up in the pit of his stomach and cramped his lungs. There came over him the feeling of preposterous injury that would have assailed a practised bus-jumper who, preparing to board a moving bus as it came by, saw it evade him by rising vertically into the air and soaring away over the housetops. It was simply one of the things that did not happen.

And on this fantastic occasion it happened. In the half-opened d r a w e r that pressed against Benny's tummy, just below the level of

the table and out of range of Mr. Tombs' glassy stare, was another brown paper parcel exactly similar in every respect to the one which Benny was finishing off. Outwardly, that is. Inside, there was a difference; for whereas inside the parcel which Benny had prepared before Mr. Tombs' eyes there were undoubtedly two thousand authentic one-pound notes, inside the second parcel there was only a collection of old newspapers and magazines cut to precisely the same size. And never before in Benny's career, once the fish had taken the hook, had those two parcels failed to be successfully exchanged. That was what the providentially falling window was arranged for, and it constituted the whole simple secret of the green goods game. The victim, when he got home and opened the parcel and discovered how he had been swindled, could not make a complaint to the police without admitting that he himself had been ready to aid and abet a fraud; and forty-nine times out of fifty he would decide that it was better to stand the loss and keep quiet about it. Elementary, but effective. And yet the whole structure could be scuppered by the unbelievable apathy of a victim who failed to react to the stimulus of a loud bang as any normal human being should have reacted.

"The—the window seems to have fallen down," Benny pointed out hoarsely; and felt like a hero of a melodrama who has just shot the villain in the appointed place at the end of the third act, and sees him smilingly declining to fall down and die according to the rehearsed script.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Tombs cordially. "I heard it."

"The—the sash-cords must have broken."

"Probably that's what it was."

"Funny thing to happen so —so suddenly, wasn't it?"

"Very funny," assented Mr. Tombs, keeping up the conversation politely.

Benny began to sweat. The substitute parcel was within six inches of his hovering hands: given only two seconds with the rapt stare of those unblinking eyes diverted from him, he could have rung the changes as easily as

unbuttoning his shirt; but the chance was not given. It was an impasse that he had never even dreamed of, and the necessity of thinking up something to cope with it on the spur of the moment stampeded him to the borders of panic.

"Have you got a knife?" asked Benny, with perspiring heartiness. "Something to cut off this end of string?"

"Let me break it for you," said Mr. Tombs.

He stood up and moved towards the table; and Benny shied like a horse.

"Don't bother, please, Mr. Tombs," he gulped. "I'll—I'll—"

"No trouble at all," said Mr. Tombs.

Benny grabbed the parcel, and dropped it. He was a very fine strategist and dramatic reciter, but he was not a man of violence—otherwise he might have been tempted to act differently. That grab and drop was the last artifice he could think of to save the day.

He pushed his chair back and bent down, groping for the fallen parcel with one hand and the substitute parcel with the other. In raising the fallen packet past the table the exchange might be made.

His left hand found the parcel on the floor. His right hand went on groping. It ran up and down the drawer, sensitively at first, then frantically. It plunged backwards and forwards. His fingernails scrabbled on the wood.... He became aware that he couldn't stay in that position indefinitely, and began to straighten up slowly, with a cold sensation closing on his heart. And as his eyes came up to the level of the drawer he saw that the dummy parcel had somehow got pushed right away to the back: for all the use it would have been to him there it might have been in the middle of the Arizona desert.

Mr. Tombs smiled blandly.

"It's quite easy, really," he said.

He took the parcel from Benny's nerveless hand, put it on the table, twisted the loose end of string round his forefinger, and jerked. It snapped off clean and short.

"A little trick of mine," said Mr. Tombs chattily. He picked up the parcel and held out his hand. "Well, Mr. Lu-

cek, you must know how grateful I am. You mustn't let me keep you any longer f r o m your—um—w i d o w. Goodby, Mr. Lucek."

He wrung Benny Lucek's limp fingers effusively, and retired towards the door. There was something almost sprightly in his gait, a twinkle in his blue eyes that had certainly not been there before, a seraphic benevolence about his smile that made Benny go hot and cold. It didn't belong to Mr. Tombs of the insurance office....

"Hey—just a m i n u t e!" gasped Benny; but the door had closed. Benny jumped up, panting. "*Hey*, you—"

He flung open the door, and looked into the cherubic pink fullmoon face of a very large gentleman in a superfluous overcoat and a bowler hat who stood on the threshold.

"Morning, Mr. Lucek," said the large gentleman sedately. "May I come in?"

He took the permission for granted, and advanced into the sitting-room. The parcel on the table attracted his attention first, and he took up a couple of bundles from the stack and looked them over. Only the top notes in each bundle were genuine pound notes, as the four whole bundles which departed with Mr. Tombs had been: the rest of the thickness was made up with sheets of paper cut to the same size.

"Very interesting," remarked the large gentleman.

"Who the devil are you?" blustered Benny; and the round rosy face turned to him with a very sudden and authoritative directness.

"I am Chief Inspector Teal, of Scotland Yard, and I have information that you are in possession of quantities of forged banknotes."

Benny drew breath again hesitatingly.

"That's absurd, Mr. Teal. You won't find any phoney stuff here," he said; and then the detective's cherubic gaze fell on the sheaf of five-pound notes that Mr. Tombs had left behind in payment.

He picked them up and examined them casually, one by one.

"H'm—and not very good forgeries, either," he said, and called to the sergeant who was waiting in the corridor outside.

ultimate TERROR

by RICHARD DEMING

THE SHELF on which cookies were displayed was too high for a five-year-old to reach. Marvin had to use the shelves below it as a ladder. His small hands gripped the edge of the shelf two levels below the cookies, and he raised one foot to the shelf just above the floor. Drawing himself upward, he placed his other foot alongside the first.

Scaling a vertical ladder is precarious business. The slightest lean backward, and gravity will undo you. Marvin pressed his thin chest tightly against the grocery rack as he cautiously raised one hand to the next higher shelf. When he had it firmly gripped, he raised his other hand, then groped upward for the next foothold.

The second shelf from the floor contained quart bottles of vinegar. Marvin's toe touched a bottle. Unable to look down, he moved his foot sidewise until he found a small gap between bottles. It wasn't quite large enough for his foot, but tentative pressure widened it a little. Encouraged, he forced his toe into the space.

The pressure was transferred from bottle to bottle

along the shelf. Three feet away, at the end of the row, a vinegar bottle was squeezed outward until it toppled to the floor and shattered with a crash that resounded through the empty grocery store.

Marvin was still clinging to the display rack in panic when his father rushed from the meat cooler to investigate the crash.

Jonas Swartz jerked the boy from his improvised ladder by the scruff of the neck. Swinging him around, he shook him by the shoulders until Marvin's teeth rattled. Then he pointed a forefinger the size of a hotdog at Marvin's nose.

"Cookies you want to steal, eh? We are raising our son to be a thief? You can't ask your father, 'Please, may I have a cookie?' You don't get enough to eat at the table, eh? We starve you."

Marvin stared at his father wordlessly.

Basically Jonas Swartz was a kindly man. He had the same sort of rough love for his son as he had for his fat wife Martha. Though a stern disciplinarian, he was just, and seldom moved by anger. The only corporal punishment he ever administered, aside from frequent shakings, was a rare and not very hard slap across the buttocks with a razor strop.

He would have been amazed and hurt to know the only emotion his son felt for him was fear.

From Marvin's diminutive viewpoint his father was a huge, blustering, red-faced ogre who ruled his restricted world. At moments such as the present he was stricken dumb with terror.

"Can't you speak?" the grocer inquired, giving Marvin another shake. "Answer, you hear!"

A doorway at the rear of the shop gave onto the stairway to the second-floor living quarters. From this doorway a woman's sharp voice said, "Marvin, what you do to make your father angry?"

Though her words were addressed to the boy, Martha Swartz's gaze was fixed accusingly on her husband. She made a point of never interfering with her husband's discipline, but she also made a point of automatically and silently disapproving of it.

Releasing his grip on the boy's shoulder, the grocer

frowned at his fat wife. Marvin instantly scooted to the protection of his mother's arms and began to howl loudly.

Jonas yelled above the din, "He was s t e a l i n g cookies again. And a bottle of vinegar he broke. Shut up, boy!"

Marvin's howls immediately subsided to a frightened whimper.

"See?" Martha said with grim satisfaction. "You got him scared of you. A fine thing, a son should be scared of his own father."

Jonas' face reddened. "He's so scared, why don't he mind? A dozen times I say, 'Don't steal the cookies. You want a cookie, ask your father.' So he pays attention? He's so scared he shakes in his boots and never steals again?" He snorted, then added sarcastically, "Or maybe he's too scared to ask even."

Jonas' face reddened. "He's he'd put his finger on the exact reason Marvin didn't ask. The urge to avoid his father was so great, he preferred to risk being caught stealing rather than ask Jonas for anything.

Giving her son's shoulder a comforting pat, Martha said, "Next time you ask, Marvin. You hear? Run play now."

Marvin moved toward the rear stairs, anxious to get out of his father's sight.

Jonas called, "Marvin!"

The boy stopped in the d o o r w a y and looked back fearfully.

"This time I'm through talking," Jonas said. "This time you're gonna learn once and for all to mind. Tonight we'll have a little lesson."

Marvin paled to the roots of his hair. "A little lesson" meant the razor strop. Even Marvin's mother would have been astonished to know the depths of fear Jonas' words caused in the boy. Though she automatically disapproved of the strop, she was never very concerned when Jonas used it. When Jonas punished the boy, he required Marvin to grasp his ankles, then methodically laid two light but stinging slaps across the buttocks with the strop, neither hard enough to leave more than momentary redness. The punishment was more psychological than corporal.

Unfortunately Marvin had imagination. Probably if his father had administered his infrequent strappings on the

spot when he misbehaved, they wouldn't have upset him any more than they upset his mother. But his father's habit of pronouncing sentence, then making the boy wait until bedtime, gave him hours of miserable anticipation. Waiting was such pure torture, the actual strapping was almost anticlimactical. Marvin fled up the stairs.

Martha frowned at her husband, but she didn't object. Instead she showed her displeasure by standing by and watching Jonas sweep up the glass and mop up the spilled vinegar from Marvin's misadventure. Ordinarily she not only would have performed this chore h e r s e l f, she wouldn't even have let her husband help.

Upstairs Marvin flung himself on his bed and cried. He was still lying there, but no longer crying, when his mother came up to fix lunch a half hour later. At her urging he sullenly got up and pecked at a sandwich. But he had no appetite to eat more than a quarter of it. His mind was too full of the terrible thing that was going to happen to him at bedtime.

Luncheon procedure in the Swartz home was for Mrs. Swartz and Marvin to eat together, then Martha fixed her husband's lunch and left it on the table for him while she went downstairs to tend the store. They couldn't eat as a family without leaving the store unattended.

Marvin followed his mother downstairs and sidled to the front of the store to avoid his father. Jonas clumped upstairs to lunch.

A smattering of customers came and went during the half hour Jonas was upstairs, keeping Martha too busy to pay much attention to Marvin. He stood in the front window, broodingly l o o k i n g at the street outside, his mind blank of e v e r y t h i n g but one thought: the bedtime strapping.

He paid no attention to what either his mother or the customers were saying until Mrs. M u r t o g, who lived around the corner, stopped in the doorway on the way out and called back, "Give your mama my best, Mrs. Swartz. And watch that New York traffic. You don't want to end up in the hospital with her."

When Mrs. Murtog went out, Marvin ran back to the

meat counter and asked, "What'd she mean, mama, about the hospital?"

"Your grandma is in a hospital in New York City, dear. She had another asthma attack."

Marvin's eyes grew enormous. "She going to die?"

"Of course not," Martha said, smiling at him. "She'll be laid up a couple of days is all. I just got to go up to mind your grandpa until she's better. He's got too feeble to mind himself."

"You mean you're going away?" Marvin asked incredulously.

"On the five-thirty train. Just over the weekend, dear. I'll be back Monday."

Marvin looked forward in horror to bedtime that night. He couldn't face the thought of taking his strapping without his mother there to lend moral support, and afterward to comfort him.

"Don't go, mama," he said in a low voice.

She frowned at him. "I got to take care of your grandpa, Marvin. He's got so old, he forgets to eat unless you tell him. You want I should let him starve?"

"Don't go," he said more loudly. "Don't leave me alone with *him!*"

Martha looked shocked. "You're scared to stay with your own father? Shame on you."

"Please, mama," he begged tearfully.

"Stop such nonsense!" she ordered in a crisp tone. "You're too big to be a mama's boy. Your father will feed you and put you to bed just like when I'm here. You mind him nice. You hear?"

The clatter of Jonas' feet on the stairs cut short any further pleading. As his father appeared, Marvin faded to the front of the store again. The moment Jonas became busy with a customer, Marvin circled around to the rear of the stairs and scooted up to his room.

The rest of the afternoon Marvin stayed upstairs suffering from an acute case of misery. About three thirty he heard his mother come up, and from the sounds she made in the other room he knew she was packing a suitcase. Flopping on his bed, he turned his face to the wall.

A long time later his mother came into the room and said softly, "Marvin, you

sleeping?"

He kept his face to the wall and made no answer.

Gently she shook his shoulder. "Marvin, I want you should go tell your father to phone the taxi. It's almost five."

He pretended to be asleep.

"Marvin!" she said more sharply, shaking harder.

It was no use to pretend further. Rolling over he said sullenly. "What?"

"Go tell your father to phone the taxi. I don't want to miss my train."

Silently he rolled off the bed and shuffled out of the room. He was going down the stairs one lagging step at a time when his mother called shrilly, "Hurry, slowpoke! You want I should miss the train?"

That was exactly what Marvin wanted. He had decided on a last desperate effort to keep his mother home by simply not relaying her message. But her shout undid him. His father heard it.

When Marvin appeared in the lower doorway, Jonas said, "What's your mother yelling? She wants me to call the taxi already?"

Reluctantly Marvin nodded his head.

"At a quarter to five, and only fifteen minutes to the station? Yah, women!"

He went to the phone and called for a taxi.

As the boy turned to go upstairs again, his father called, "Marvin!"

Marvin looked over his shoulder.

"Stay here," Jonas ordered. "Watch by the window for the taxi, so you can tell your mama."

Slowly Marvin shuffled over to the front window and took up his vigil. Time dragged by minute by minute. Martha appeared from upstairs, a flowered hat perched on her round head and a medium-sized suitcase in her hand. Jonas took the suitcase from her, carried it front and set it down by the door just as the taxi pulled up outside.

"Here it is," Jonas announced.

Martha hurriedly grabbed up the suitcase, as though she feared the taxi wouldn't wait unless she ran out immediately, gave her husband a peck of a kiss and stooped to kiss Marvin lightly on the cheek.

"Be a good boy," she said

breathlessly. "Mind your father nice. You hear?"

"Don't worry about us," Jonas said, giving his son an affable pat on the shoulder. "We'll make out fine."

The cheerfulness of his father's tone flooded Marvin with hope. Perhaps he had forgotten the promised "little lesson."

His mother dashed the hope. In stunned outrage he listened to her say, "Mind you don't use the strop too hard, Jonas. He's only a child."

"Did I ever?" Jonas protested. "Do I make him bleed?"

Then Jonas was holding open the door and Martha was bustling through it to the cab. The grocer stood in the doorway waving after it, and Martha returned his waves through the rear window until it was out of sight. Marvin didn't wave. He stood stone-still, staring after the cab through tear-dimmed eyes until he couldn't see it anymore.

Jonas closed the door, glanced at the wall clock and said, "Ach, closing time."

He threw the inner bolt and Marvin was all alone with him.

The boy stood in miserable silence as his father covered the vegetable rack, straightened shelves and replaced stock which had moved with items from the storeroom. He still had not moved when Jonas began transferring meat from the meat-display counter to the meat cooler.

"Marvin!" Jonas called.

Moving woodenly, Marvin went toward his father and behind the meat counter. Jonas was dropping four thick pork chops into a paper bag.

"Our dinner," the grocer said, handing the bag to Marvin. "You want to carry up?"

Silently Marvin accepted the bag.

Jonas made two more trips to the cooler. Each time when he emerged, he moved his heavy shoulders in a peculiar gesture, as though shrugging off the coldness of the cooler's interior. As he started to make a third trip, carrying a tray of hamburger, a sudden breathtaking thought hit Marvin.

Before he could stop to analyze the thought, and perhaps lose the courage to carry through, the boy set the bag of pork chops on the cutting block and ran to the cooler. His father was just setting the hamburger tray on a shelf

at the rear when Marvin slammed the heavy door.

With both small hands he grasped the thick bolt and shot it home.

Then he stood still with his heart pounding and terror gripping his stomach at the enormity of what he had done. The "little lesson" would be mild compared to what his father would do to him for this.

From the other side of the door there came a faint pounding, barely audible because of the heavy insulation. When it went on and on with monotonous rhythm, Marvin moved back until he could no longer hear it.

He considered what to do. The choice wasn't too complicated even for a five-year-old mind. He could open the door again, or leave it shut.

The former action would bring drastic, and probably immediate punishment, he knew. He decided the matter required more thought.

He went up the stairs, forgetting the pork chops, and wandered around the house aimlessly for some time. Eventually, when he grew hungry, he made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and ate it. There was milk in the refrigerator, but he decided on the luxury of a glass of water instead.

As he ate, his thoughts about his father downstairs grew more and more desultory. The longer he left him there, he knew, the greater would be the eventual punishment. But also the longer he left him there, the farther off was the punishment.

He didn't have the stomach to face his father without his mother there to lend moral support. He decided to wait for her. It was Friday now, and she'd be home by Monday.

He stayed up until midnight, and went to bed without taking a bath.

second chance

by NORMAN KATKOV

JANE PUT her arms around my neck, dug her fingers in my ear, and then, deciding that a city editor didn't have to work, started pulling my hair gently. There were a few stories I had to assign, I needed a cup of coffee, and I wanted one of the rewrite men to call the South St. Paul police station and ask if Nate Berg, my police reporter, was there yet.

That Tremont kidnaping was already a 12-day-old baby and we hadn't even changed diapers on the first day's story. But I always had time to look at my girl.

"Hello, lovely," I said. "You going to marry me this week?" She was lovely, make no mistake.

"Next week," she answered.

I'd been hearing that for two years, but I couldn't complain. I could still look at her. She was the best woman reporter in town; just what the movies would have chosen to play herself: Five feet four inches, legs for dancing and arms for tennis, and face—well, face for me: pug nose, small mouth, hair

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the color of the rotogravure. This was my girl, man. I'd waited 33 years to pick a winner, and I had the champ. But she wouldn't have me.

"Tommy?" When she said it that way, it was grief for me: A day off, a campaign for a new community house, a speech, where I ate chicken a la king, regretted it for three days afterward and, after dinner, agreed with every guest that the newspaper business was the most fascinating in the world.

"What am I being made for?" I wanted to know. I was afraid of her eyes, they were suddenly like your glasses when you come into a warm room out of the cold.

"Tommy, Dad is outside in the reception room. He got back last week. I want you to give him a job on the News."

Jack Lewis was Jane's father, but he was also the man that couldn't get a job on any paper in the country. He was the guy, if you remember that far back, who, when he was city editor of the old St. Paul Star, had pocketed a cool grand a month for over two years for not printing a word about the capers the police were pulling—and they were doing everything, including murder. He'd run the best afternoon paper in town right into the ground; he'd started at least two dozen cub reporters thinking the way he did; and he'd been told politely one afternoon in a dining room in the Gopher Club that he didn't want to be seen again in St. Paul for a long, long time. This was no speech she was asking me to make.

"I'm sorry, honey." I was sorry for her, not for the old man. I'd been a cub reporter on the News when he pulled out and Jack Lewis and me thought differently. We didn't belong on the same ball club.

"Tom, he's changed," she pleaded.

Maybe he had. I'd been copy boy, cub reporter, police reporter, sports writer, movie critic, rewrite man and city editor and I'd come to the stage where I believed in two things: my newspaper and Tom Royal. Anything else I looked at and I forgot.

"Tom, he's still the best reporter you'll ever see."

"Sure, I know."

"You've got to, Tom. He needs a job. Here, where they chased him out."

"Tom, the pal, huh, Jane? Tom, the big brother that'll do anything Jane asks?"

She got as pale as the first papers coming off the presses before the ink soaks. I was rolling and unrolling the paper, the way a carrier does before he wings it at a porch, when Fred Gates, my assistant, handed me the phone, his face looking like somebody had a tie around his neck and was pulling the ends of it in opposite directions.

It was the city hospital. An intern gave it to me short and sweet: Nate Berg was there with both legs smashed and his throwing arm broken. He'd been riding with the dicks to South St. Paul when they'd slammed into a truck going to the stockyards. The cows, I understood, were all right.

Jane's face when I looked up at her was like a kid's when you come to see him with your hands behind your back. I tried not to think I was doing it because of Jane, but I'd been using honest dice with myself too long. I needed him, and a lot can be forgotten in 15 years.

She went out of the room like a murder had just broken. I had time to light my pipe before she was back with Jack. I shook hands and introduced him to Fred, but all he got from Gates was flesh, there was no life to the grip.

"You've read the Tremont snatch?" I asked. He nodded. "You up on it?" He nodded again. I told him the name of the chief of police in South St. Paul. "Get me what you can," I said. He nodded once more, started his hand toward me, stopped it, started to say something, thought better of that, turned to Jane for an instant, bent his head to kiss her hair and walked out of the office.

I watched his shoes, not dirty and not shined, but looking the way shoes do when you try to keep them clean yourself. I sat down slowly and I could feel Gates' eyes on my Adam's apple.

Jane sat down across from Fred. He got up for some water and Jane half rose in her chair leaning over toward me. "Why don't I love you, Tommy?"

"Because I'm a w r o n g guy."

"I want to, Tom."

"I'm like caviar. Hang around." The best I could do was the kind of smile you give some guy that's on his back in a hospital and knows he's never getting up.

"I don't like caviar," she smiled.

Nuts! I was getting paid to put out a newspaper and I didn't want that vinegar taste in my mouth this early in the day. "Listen, Jane," I said, "here's what I was going to tell you when you came in: Jo Ann Tremont's nurse, the woman that took care of the kid from the time she was five until last summer, is living out at White Bear Lake. She's got a cottage out there. Now don't get excited," I warned. "She hasn't got the kid, but she knows enough about her to give you a damn' good story about the brat. Go on out and get enough for three quarters of a column and come in and write it yourself."

"How did you find that out, Tom?"

I was a little tired of talking to her. "That's my business."

She looked like I'd slapped her. She got pencils, folded some copy paper and went for her coat. On her way out she stopped at the desk. "You're like a chameleon," she snapped. "One minute you're the nicest guy in the world, the next instant you're a jerk. How can you change so often?"

"I never change about you, lovely," I answered. She took that with her.

The janitor came in with the first edition. There was an overnight story on the kidnaping on the front page and it made me sick to look at it. Most of the story was rehash, written yesterday evening: The girl had been playing alone in the back yard of her home; a maid had seen her at 3:30; the girl was missed about six when Mrs. Tremont came home from a bridge game. The kidnapers called that night, asking for $100,000. The Tremonts told police and that was the end. I'd worked the Bohn, Bremer, Hamm and Weyerhauser snatches, but I'd never seen the likes of this.

I was halfway through Winchell when Roy Hynan, the managing editor, came out of his office and across the city room to me. You'd have thought I was wearing

a bright red shirt.

"Tom, what in Harry's horse is going on in your mind?"

I waited for it.

"Did you send Jack Lewis out to South St. Paul?"

"Berg's in the hospital," I answered. "I didn't have anything else I could do, and he's still the best you and me will ever see."

"I don't give a damn if he's Richard Harding Davis come back. When he comes in tonight, pay him for a day and tell him to stay away." He went charging off again.

Lewis must have heard him in South St. Paul, because just then the phone was in Fred's hand and he shoved it at me." Tom?" I heard. "Jack Lewis. You may want to tell me to go home when you hear this, but I think we've got something." He sounded as excited as a cub at a four-alarm fire.

"What you got, Jack?" All right, so we were buddies.

"Tom, you remember Paul Ryan? He was a dick in St. Paul when I was here." I knew what that meant. "Well, Paul is night captain down here. The desk sergeant told me when I got here and was moseying around. Right. There wasn't anything but the F.B.I. at the Tremont house so I went down to Concord Street." That was the main drag. "I saw Ryan in the cafe at Concord and Church. He was sitting there alone and the guy waiting on him was Al the Slop. You *must* remember him—he got 10 to 20 on the post-office robbery out here in 1929." I listened, trying to figure it out. Ryan was wrong, always had been. The Slop I remembered too: a thief, a killer, a dope addict.

"You there, Tom?"

"I haven't been fired."

"Tom, I want to talk to Ryan. He'll remember me, and he'll maybe talk a little. If he won't talk, then I'll know he's wrong, and I'll hit back to the cafe and wait until he comes in to flash the Slop. I can spot anything they do, and maybe get a story. Okay?"

I thought of Roy Hynan and I thought of Jane, and I thought of 15 years vagging around the country looking at city editors' necks when he asked them for a job. "All right," I said, "but watch yourself, and keep me post-

ed."

I was excited myself. Jeeps, but I hoped he was right. I could use a good story. A city editor is like a grade-school teacher. She wants the youngsters to get good grades, because then she knows she's getting someplace, but she gets no credit from the parents, who think the brats are all Quiz Kids. Well, the paper was my class, the local news anyway, and you never saw my name on it, but when there was a good story we sold papers, and when we sold papers I was as high as any maiden teacher.

I always liked to have all the holes plugged when there was a big story breaking. I sent one photographer to the Tremont home and another down to Concord and Church with instructions to wait until he heard from me. When they left I began to get that feeling of helplessness. I don't know how a father-to-be feels, waiting in the hospital, but I'd been sweating out editorial babies since I got on the desk. There isn't a thing you can do but wait.

I was lucky today. My big baby came in just then, and I knew she had something. She banged into the chair at my side.

"We got us just one little jewel of a story," she said talking to the typewriter while she was punching the keys.

"What?" I asked. After all I had a little equity in this thing myself.

"That woman," she said. "The nurse, Miss Elizabeth Simpson. 56. Single. Hates Mrs. Tremont. Likes Mr. Tremont. This spring she quit when Mrs. Tremont got a new cook. Didn't like the cook. Didn't like the cook's boy friend always hanging around. Little guy. Not clean, she said. Dirty clothes, dirty hands, dirty face." She was like a typewriter spelling out Al the Slop for me.

Cripes! It was going up like an erector set. I could feel my shirt sticking to my back. The Slop's girl get's a job in the Tremont house, and he has his foot in the door. He promises Ryan a piece of what they're going to get. They spend a few months putting their house in order, and then—Wham!—the kidnaping. Holy Smokes! We'd hit pay dirt!

"Tom! Tom, for Pete's sakes, Tom, what's up?" It was Jane moving in on my dreams.

"Look," I answered. "You got a story to write. Write it for me but keep it short. We'll use it later."

"Why later?"

"Look, Miss America. Your old man just called me. He spotted a bloke in a cafe at Concord and Church, a guy by the name of Al the Slop." That didn't mean a thing to her. I leaned over the desk. "Al the Slop." I said it slowly. "Dirty face, dirty clothes, dirty hands. He's working in the joint."

The sun came up then. She sat down and hugged herself, she was that happy.

"Now you write me that story," I ordered. "Then you get a sedan. Leave your car here." There were a few people in Minnesota who didn't know that roadster of hers—but they were in Stillwater prison. "Get down to that cafe. If a copper comes in and talks to the Slop, call me. If he comes in and they leave together or separately, pick up your Dad, he'll most likely be across the street, and follow them."

I got a story out of her all right. There wouldn't be a woman reading that yarn that wouldn't run to the bedroom to see if her kid had thrown the blankets off the bed. She got out, and I called the office boy over. I got him into a car and told him to keep cruising between the cafe and the Tremont home and to call me whenever he saw anything out of line.

Well, there I was. I told Fred Gates about it, and let him think about something besides a double whisky. We didn't have a copy boy in the place, so the two of us sat there making sandwiches of carbon and paper, getting ready for it when it came—if it came.

The noon edition came up then, and it made me sick to look at it. The same kidnap story on the front, and I needed a good story as much as a losing pitcher needs a win. Fred Gates began squirming in the chair. He wanted that noontime bracer, but I was afraid to let him out of my sight. That guy was maybe going to write a couple thousand words in a few hours.

The janitor came in with

the Minneapolis papers. They didn't have anything either, but it didn't make me feel any better. It's like when you were a kid in school: If you flunked a test, you didn't give a damn if everybody in the class flunked it; you still had the "F" alongside your name.

Hynan came barging across the room just then. "Tom, did you see that kidnaping story on the front?" What did he think I was reading, wedding announcements?

"Sure I saw it."

"Well for Harry's horse, Tom, how long do you want me to keep putting out a paper with stories like that?" Him putting out a paper? The old geezer couldn't put out a milk bottle.

"Roy, I got a story coming," I promised. "It's a beat and it'll be the best and the cleanest beat this town has had in 20 years." Now I was betting ahead of the die. Boy, I was loaded with brains today.

"Where is it?" he asked. I pulled out the desk drawer. "Here, it's in here, take a peek."

He actually started to bend over. Then he straightened and ran away from the desk. He got all the way over to the teletype machines before he stopped and turned. "You better have a story, Tom—I'm getting tired." He was tired! I was exhausted.

I added the credit total then: Amost sure proof that Al the Slop and Ryan were working together; Jane's interview; two photographers and a copy boy. The debit side? Jack Lewis, a proven crook, and my hunch that he was as right now as he'd been wrong 15 years ago.

The phone rang, and Gates and me fought for it. I won. It was Jack Lewis. "Tom? I just had a chat with Ryan. He didn't enjoy seeing me. We talked in headquarters and after he learned I was working the story he dummied up."

"Did you get anything?" I asked.

"He just went out the back way, slow like. I'm taking a cab down to the cafe."

I let him hang up without telling him Jane was inside the place. I went to the morgue and got Tremont pictures and 15-year-old pictures of the Slop and Ryan.

I came back. I walked over to the teletype machines and didn't see a word of print. And I came back. I was on my way for a drink of water when the phone went off. Gates shoved it at me. It was Jane this time.

"Tom," she was whispering. "The Slop has gone for his coat. Ryan is up at the cashier's cage waiting. I'm going out to the sedan and follow along."

"You're my girl. Your pa is on his way down. If he doesn't get there in time, pick up the photographer across the street and stay with them."

"Oh, Tom," she said. "Oh, Tom, I love you." I heard the click and I said into the mouthpiece: "You're a liar. You're a liar and you shouldn't say it."

I gave Gates the clippings and told him to write himself out on all the background stuff, both on the Tremonts and on Ryan and the Slop. It was going to be an extra if it was going to be anything, and I wanted to be ready. The phone rang again. It was the office boy and he didn't waste time.

"Mr. Royal, I was driving past the cafe and a car came out of the alley like a bat out of hell, and behind it was another car with Jane Lewis and two men." That would be Jack and the photographer. "I thought I'd better call you."

"Son, you're doing fine." I wondered if he could hear me tremble. "You just go up to the Tremont home and tell our photographer to take pictures of the house. Then you come back here with him."

I hung up and turned to Gates. "Fred, we're in." He got a little white. Even coffee would have helped him then. Now I had it, and I could start the cameras when I got the "Go" sign from Janie or the old man. Oh, BROTHER! Do you know what it feels like to be sitting on top of something like that?

Well, I'd mixed the batter. I just had to wait for the oven to warm up now. I had about an hour before our last dead line, and it wasn't going to be fun unless I got a phone call quick.

I did. It was Janie. "Tom," she started. "I'm in Inver Grove." That's a village glued on to South St. Paul, running

for about a mile south of the town. "They went off the highway into the brush. Right under our noses. We parked the car and walked through—you owe me for a pair of stockings—and their car is parked next to a two-story house near the river. They're right here, but I don't know for how long."

"There'll be law there in five minutes, girl. You stand on the corner at Concord. I'll have enough coppers there in five minutes to start a police force."

I told the operator to get me police headquarters. I said to Fred: "Write it under Jack Lewis' by-line and write it fast. Put cops crashing into the place in the story too."

He got up from the desk. "Not me," he announced.

"Write it."

"Not me." He was on his way out. What a banker that bird would have made. I had police headquarters on the phone and I talked to the G-man in charge. I told him to watch for Janie and keep her out of the way if he could.

I got "By Jack Lewis" high on a sheet of paper, and started writing the story myself. I'd have at least 15 to 20 minutes on the opposition and on Minneapolis, and I was going to gamble. If Ryan and Slop had beat it with the girl, or if they didn't have the girl, or if there was gunplay, I was a goner. I wrote it straightaway, giving the paper and Lewis all the credit.

The presses were rolling in 15 minutes, and one minute after that Hynan was at my desk. He'd torn the front page off the paper and he was holding it the way you do a towel that's been dropped into a filled tub.

"Tom!" His voice was like a locomotive's first grunt.

I got up from the chair. "I'll tell you about it," I said.

He pushed me back. "I'm going to tell *you*, boy." He looked down at me. "I'm looking for a new city editor as of now." He dropped the page on my desk and sprinted away. It was 24 minutes since I'd talked to the law. It shouldn't have taken them more than five minutes to get from headquarters on Grand Avenue to Inver Grove. Give them ten minutes to get organized, another five to move in. My girl should have been

calling me by this time.

I started the routine all over again: Water, back to the desk; water again—and then the phone. Jesse Owens would have run second. It was Janie.

"Tom, what did you print?" See, she knew me.

"To hell with what I printed. What have you got?"

"Got Ryan, got the Slop, got a 12-year-old girl. No shooting. Got the best story in 10 years. Got holes in my stockings, no heels on my shoes. Got pix on their way in with the photog. Got a pencil?"

I told her the papers were up with it. It stopped her for an instant. Then: "Who wrote it, Tom?"

"Me."

"By-line?"

"Sure."

"Whose?"

"Jack Lewis."

"Tommy, Tommy, Tommy." It was like a broken record. I hung up. Just then I didn't want to make her happy any more. I felt the way you do on the Sunday night your vacation ends; you've had a wonderful two weeks, but tomorrow the office. I was a city editor, I had a news beat, but I didn't have her. The guy that swept up the place, he had a wife. Me, I had a newspaper. Even the sight of Hynan finishing a lap as he came at me again and the thought of his face when I'd tell him didn't mean a thing. I just wanted a warm shower.

"I stopped the presses," Hynan said.

"Start them."

"Who are you ordering—?"

I told him what Janie had told me. "I don't believe it," he said.

I'd already asked for police headquarters so I handed him the phone. "Ask them," I said.

He did. He had a hard job trying to talk to the police and compose the beautiful speech for the publisher at once; all about how he knew when to gamble and when not to gamble.

I picked up another phone and told the presses to roll. The copy boy and the other photographer came in. Hynan grunted at them and put his hand out.

"Tom." He shook my hand, but he didn't get any encouragement from me. "I got the best city editor in town, Tom. In the state." Listen to him.

Running wild. "I mean it, Tom."

"Thanks, Roy."

He was still there. This guy was practically in love with me. "Roy, put Jack Lewis on. The money men have forgotten him, and he'll start out as a winner with this thing."

"A damn' good idea. Those old-timers know their way around."

"I'm glad you see it that way."

"Only way to look at it." He patted my shoulder. "You've been working too hard, Tom—why, boy, you've got to take it easy." Holy smokes, why didn't he turn off the lights and play soft music?

"I'll take it easy," I promised. I told him about the pictures coming, and he said he'd handle everything. I got my coat and hat and walked out to the elevator. When the door opened, Janie slammed into me. The old man was with her. She grabbed me by the shoulder and kissed my cheek. The kind of kiss you get from aunts.

"You're working here, Jack," I said.

He looked down at his shoes. "I need a shine," he said.

We went down in the elevator together. When we got out I told him to come in at seven in the morning. He kissed Janie and went up Fourth Street. She looked up and down the block for a few seconds, then pointed her finger toward St. Peter Street. "That way," she said.

"Why that way?"

"There's a restaurant off Fifth Street where you can get caviar."

"I thought you didn't like caviar."

She leaned back against the building and studied me carefully. I wondered how she would look wearing an apron.

"Tommy?"

"What?"

"Somebody told me," she said softly, "that the more of it you eat, the better you get to like it."

I nodded, wondering how long it would take to educate her palate.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

LESLIE CHARTERIS

— tells how even an old racket could be a fresh diversion for the Saint — when he could apply a new poetic justice to it.....

RICHARD DEMING

—is the author of CASE OF THE CRIME LORD (Pocket Books) and of other novels based on the Dragnet TV program, and also of TWEAK THE DEVIL'S NOSE, WHISTLE PAST THE GRAVEYARD (both Rinehart), etc. etc.

NORMAN KATKOV

— former newspaperman and columnist, author of THE FABULOUS FANNIE, The Story of Fannie Brice (Knopf, 1953), and other books, has appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post, Esquire, Collier's, etc.*

BAYNARD KENDRICK

— a founder and former President of the Mystery Writers of America, will be remembered for his *Black Mask* novelets about Stan Rice (WHIPSAW is his first novelet about him in many years), and for his novels about Captain Duncan Maclain, the famous blind detective.

SAX ROHMER

— creator of Dr. Fu Manchu, needs no introduction to any mystery reader.

WENZELL BROWN

— author of more than twenty books and novels about Caribbean affairs and juvenile delinquency, including the just published CRY KILL (Gold Medal), TEEN AGE TERROR, PRISON GIRL, THE WICKED STREETS, etc. etc.

NEXT MONTH —

Stories by

C. S. FORESTER, POUL ANDERSON,
RANJEE SHAHANI, WILLIAM O'FARRELL,
ANTONIO HELU and others

and

THE SAINT AND THE CLEANER CURE

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WHIP SAW

THERE WAS an air of efficient, immutable, and impassive destruction about the black hulk of iron machinery that was known around a sawmill as the "hog."

It looked harmless enough from the outside. Inside, it was full of interlocking whirling knives and, after its fashion, just as competent as an H-bomb in its ability to destroy.

Slabs and edging, flitches and butts, and all other types of waste lumber dropped steadily from a trough above it all day, urged on by a slow moving big-linked endless chain. Wooden grist! Everything was instantly reduced to sawdust once it fell into the hog's insatiable maw.

Sawdust?

Well, maybe not everything—! Sausage might be more applicable if a real hog fell into its namesake. And there wouldn't be any word in the English language that would quite describe the remains of a man.

Stan Rice, and three other men, stood looking down at the monster from the second floor of the Murton Lumber Company's Pine Mill, #4, on a blistering hot Florida afternoon in June. They were staring at it speculatively. The strident din and shriek of the nearby bandsaw as it bit through logs made talking an unpleasant chore.

"Want to see what the beastie can do to a real chunk?" Clay Boland, who asked the question, was the shortest of the group, but his voice was probably the loudest. Still he had to shout it. He was Foreman of the mill, a hard looking man in a gray flannel shirt open at the neck to display thick chest hair. Crescents of sweat showed at his armpits. His left cheek was bulged with a chew of fine cut.

Miles Standish Rice, Special Investigator for the State's Attorney's Office grinned down at Boland from his towering height of six-foot-three, but the grin was more nervous than mirthful. There were fine lines of worry on Stan's deeply tanned forehead. A couple of drops of perspiration trickled down slowly from his thatch of bright yellow hair.

"You say that thing could chew up a man?"

"Hamburg with sawdust," Boland yelled. "Want to

see?"

"Not on a *man*!"

"I'll use a board—ten feet long. Watch!"

Stan nodded silently.

Boland raised his thick muscular arm and signaled to a Negro who was sorting out waste from the conveyor a dozen feet away. The man left his post and walked over to the foreman. Boland put his lips close to the mill-hand's ear and shouted words that were lost in the scream of the saw. The black face reflected surprise. Boland shouted again. The man shrugged and shuffled back to the wide conveyor-belt.

Stan was watching him closely.

He took a pole with a hook on the end and reflected a ten foot pine board from the wide conveyor-belt into the trough with the endless chain that led to the hog. The chain took hold, moving the board inexorably along until it reached the end. Slowly the board up-ended, hung in space for a precarious moment, then plunged down into the hog's wide mouth.

Kah-choff!

There was a sound from the hog as though it might have choked on a fishbone. The ten foot board was gone.

"Satisfied?" Boland was close enough for Stan to hear him and to get a whiff of the tobacco on his breath at the same time.

"I'm impressed! But you should call that monster a hippo. It could macerate a mule." Stan turned his frosty blue eyes toward Burgess Murton, owner of the mill in a gaze of inquiry, and yelled: "What's next?"

Murton merely mopped his brow with a sodden linen handkerchief and returned Stan's gaze with a hopeless expression.

Stan tried the same question on John Fleming, the Superintendent of the mill. Fleming was a thin man who wore owlish tortoise-shell glasses. He was mainly distinguishable from the rest because of his total lack of sunburn. His answer was to turn away and scowl down over the railing at the mouth of the hog below as he slowly shook his head of thinning hair in a gesture of indecision.

Apparently Clay Boland was the only one who wasn't in a state of shock. He ac-

curately directed a stream of tobacco juice toward a pile of sawdust and took charge again, beckoning the three men to follow him down a flight of frame steps leading to the floor below.

Stan fell in at the rear. Three steps down he turned for a last quick look at the men, and found himself the center of interest of every man working on the second floor.

There was a flash of the whites of eyes in black faces as the crew on the compressed air carriage, lurching violently back and forth as a log fed into the bandsaw, caught Stan's survey and hurriedly turned away. The sawyer, seated in a pit that brought him eye-level with the log as it rushed by didn't bother to hide the interest in his narrowed eyes, manipulating the levers which controlled the cut entirely by feel. A small knot of men, gathered on a platform where the lumber was graded after cutting, were covertly watching Stan, too.

Menace? Stan didn't know. More likely it was fear. Whatever it was, it wasn't good, and it was filling the air.

Stan went on down, grateful to find that the noise was somewhat less on the ground floor.

"I'm afraid I just can't stand another look at that—at the—" John Fleming took off his glasses and polished them with a wadded piece of Kleenex taken from his pocket. His words were directed to Burgess Murton. "I'm—well, I just can't, that's all."

"Nuts! You should have had a touch of war in your life, John!" The mill owner shrugged wide shoulders under an expensively tailored summer suit and jerked his head toward Boland. "Come on, let's get it over with, Clay."

Fleming turned to walk away. His weak eyes met Stan's inquiring glance as he passed. "I just can't take it again," he said apologetically. "Makes me sick to my stomach."

Clay Boland walked around to the other side of a pit dug under the hog which stood on a trestle of its own. Again the hog grunted loudly. Looking down Stan saw a shower of sawdust drop into the rectangular bin at his

feet.

"The hog empties into there," Boland explained. "When that fills up the sawdust is taken out and used for fuel. Never waste anything."

"Except time," Murton broke in impatiently. "Mr. Rice is here to see the body."

For a moment Boland chewed impassively while he studied his employer with a hard humorless stare. Then he said: "Did you say body? Yeah. I thought you did." He spat accurately at a chip of wood in the sand. "Well, call it what you like. You're the boss."

He leaned over and raised a four foot section of boards disclosing a continuation of the pit under the hog. Stan leaned over the edge and fought a retching in his stomach as he peered at a dark reddish mass clotting the sawdust in the bottom of the bin.

"You asked for it, mister," Boland said. "'Tain't purty, is it? Nobody would'a seen it, 'cept the man is sick whose 'sposed to dump it out for the furnaces every day."

"That's what's left of Lafe Storrs, my Assistant Foreman," Murton said in a tight voice. "We're supposed to be keeping it for the Coroner. God knows what for!"

Boland said: "We knew it was really Lafe by a ring he wore. Had enough?"

"Too much." Stan took a deep breath and turned away.

"I was going to shut down the mill," Murton said as they rejoined Fleming who had been standing a safe distance away. "Fleming, here, was afraid we'd have a riot on our hands."

"You don't live here, then?" Stan asked.

"In this dump?" Burton sounded surprised at the idea. "Hell, no! My home is forty miles from here in Kissimmee. This is just one of my mills. Temporary installation, as you can see. It will be cut out in three years more.

"Then we'll tear all these beautiful houses down and move them to a worse dump for four or five years—if you can find one." Boland emphasized his disgust with a tobacco stream. "The damn shacks are only twenty-five years old now. Just temporary!"

"What are you trying to

do, make more trouble, Clay?" Fleming cut in, his high voice sharp with anger. "There are worse camps than this one."

"I wouldn't know," Boland said. "I've never worn stripes in a road camp. That's the only type I can think of that would be worse than here."

"Save the fight for after school, boys," Stan said shortly. "I want to get this straight. Mr. Murton owns this mill, but you're in complete charge of the mill and the cutting operations, and you live here at the mill. Is that right, Mr. Fleming?"

"That's correct." Fleming adjusted the brim of a battered straw hat to shield his glasses from the glare of the sun that was dropping low in the west. "I had rather hoped to keep the discovery of Storrs'—ah—remains a secret. But, as I feared, when I phoned Mr. Murton, he called you in Orlando and I realized just how impossible that would be."

"Rough!" Stan said. "In a few hours more he might have helped to heat up the boilers—if the firemen didn't notice anything as they shoveled him in. Sure would have saved a lot of trouble. I agree." He turned to Murton. "Anything else you want me to see?"

Murton looked at Boland.

The Foreman shook his head. "He said he'd had plenty. Take 'em over to your office, John, where you can hear yourself think. I'd better stick around here—anything can happen when panic hits the hands in a sawmill."

Fleming led Stan and Murton to the end of a loading platform where they started walking ties down a stretch of railroad track. To their right was a small lake, converted now into a log boom.

Stan paused briefly watching two hands in a flat-bottom boat as they maneuvered a thirty foot tree into position at the bottom of the V-shaped log hoist. Caught by the dogs on the heavy endless chain, the tree started on its journey to the second floor of the mill. Half of it had disappeared inside at the top when a giant circular saw, controlled by unseen hands, dropped down cutting the tree neatly into two fifteen foot lengths with a quick ear-piercing drone.

Stan turned away and

walked on. It was something to think about: how abruptly, and efficiently, fifty or a hundred years of God given growth could be terminated in a sawmill.

"Have you notified the sheriff?" Murton asked Fleming when they were far enough away from the mill to allow conversation in a normal tone.

"Why, no. You as much as told me to keep it quiet when I phoned you." Fleming glanced over his shoulder at Stan. "You're some sort of a lawman, aren't you?"

"I'm attached to the State's Attorney's office," Stan told him. "But I'm also allowed to take some private cases on my own. This happens to be one of them. You'll still have to call the sheriff. Murder comes under jurisdiction of the county."

"A lot of good that will do," Murton said sarcastically. "You just had a look at a member of the sheriff's office—Lafe Storrs. He not only worked for me, but he was a Deputy Sheriff—supposed to keep order and law around this mill. That's why I sent for you."

"That's right," Fleming added. "We didn't even find a piece of his badge. I'm afraid you've got a pretty tough job cut out for you."

Fleming held open the screen door of a one story pine building. Beside the door faded white letters on a slab read: OFFICE. Inside it was pleasantly dim and cool.

A woman with her hair done up in an unfashionable bun looked up over a pair of bobbing pince-nez. She was as weather-beaten as the boards of the office, or the typewriter she was working on.

"Mr. Crandall's waiting to see you, Mr. Fleming."

"Where, Mrs. King?"

"In here." The entire office consisted of three rooms: a reception room where Mrs. King had her desk, and two smaller rooms at the rear. Howard Crandall, a portly gray-haired man in a dark blue suit, stuck his head out of the door of the left hand room. "Oh, hello Murton. Glad you're here."

"I thought you'd get out here earlier," Murton greeted Crandall testily. "This is Miles Standish Rice. Howard Crandall's vice-president of

the Florida Pine Insurance Co.—the 'vice' is robbing customers on his adjustments for fire."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Crandall."

"Yes," Crandall said, and offered Stan a hand as limp as an empty glove. Stan, who had a phobia about limp handshakes, squeezed it sadistically and enjoyed the anger that showed in Crandall's gray eyes.

When they were settled in the office, Fleming closed the door and took the chair in back of his desk after switching on an oscillating fan on top of an old-fashioned safe in the corner.

"It's hotter than Billy-be-damned in here," Crandall protested. "Why close the door?"

"That old biddy out there has sonar ears," Fleming said. "You might as well talk to a P.A. system hooked up to the mill. Mr. Murton hired Mr. Rice to try to straighten out the trouble we've been having here."

"I hired him to *end* it!" Murton amended, f a n n i n g himself with his expensive Panama hat. "He's as big a robber as you are, Crandall, when it comes to haggling over a fee."

"That," Stan said, "depends on the point of view. First Mr. Murton told me over the phone, there had been fires. When I got here, I found there had been considerably more. There are some things that aren't worth any amount of fee."

"Oh?" Crandall's gray eyes estimated Stan's slender figure, not overlooking the breadth of shoulders and the hard flat belly. Clad in OD riding breeches and a light brown shirt with s h o r t sleeves, he gave a deceptively youthful appearance as he stretched his long legs out before him and lolled in the hard-backed chair. "Plenty deceptive!" Crandall decided. Under that boyish yellow hair Miles Standish Rice was as deadly and tenacious as one of those slender Sidewinder rockets that couldn't be shaken off until they went up your exhaust pipe and blew up your plane.

"You can't do any worse than the investigators our company has had out here." Crandall's eyes locked with Stan's blue ones. "I suppose Murton has told you what

four fires in this mill have cost my company."

"So what's your beef?" Murton asked him. "You upped our premium on the last policy, and that expires day after tomorrow. You've already said you wouldn't renew it."

"How right you are, Daddy-O!" Crandall turned to Stan with a joyless smile. "Another month at the rate we've been paying off on this pine tinder-box and my outfit would fold for good. I can't afford to arm all the men working here with water-pistols."

"They may need live ammunition before this caper is wound up—from what I've seen so far this afternoon." Stan looked out of the screened window and watched a puff of white steam that spurted from the side of the mill at regular intervals. "Haven't your men been able to get any line on any of the fires?"

Crandall shook his head. "All they've found out is that somebody in the mill is out to make trouble."

"But no guesses as to who?"

"No guesses. No soap."

"But Lafe Storrs must have found out something," Fleming suggested quietly. "He's deader than dead."

"How was he killed?" Crandall swung around to Fleming.

"That's hard to say." Fleming gave his horn-rimmed glasses a thorough nervous cleaning. "He fell into the hog—or was pushed. It's not the best way—"

"God above!" Crandall's florid face blanched. "Somebody really is playing rough. Lafe was a nice guy. He was a Deputy, too. Did you know that, Rice?"

"Yes. I heard that his badge was chewed up with him, too."

"I don't blame you for socking Murton for plenty. If they'll make mincemeat of a Deputy Sheriff—well, what do you think they'd do to you?"

"They can't do any more than they did to Lafe," Stan reminded him drily. "And I won't get my badge chewed up because I don't wear one." He looked out the window again watching the steam.

"That reminds me." Murton shifted in his chair and tugged at his coat collar to

free the back of his light suit which had stuck to his shirt with perspiration. "I've got to go and see his daughter. I should do that right now."

"Lafe Storrs' daughter?" Stan turned away from the window.

"Yes."

"Mind if I go with you? I'd like to talk to her, too."

"Come along." Murton stood up. "Where does she live, John?"

"One of the cabins on the other side of the commissary." Fleming shoved back his swivel chair. "You'll never find it. They all look alike. I'd better come along and show you. You mind, Crandall?"

"Just give me your insurance record book out of the safe." He moved to the chair that Fleming had vacated back of the desk. "I have some checking to do. I don't envy you the next ten minutes."

Mrs. King didn't look up from her typing as they went through the outside room. They were in front of the office when a locomotive whistle blew—a long and two shorts, cutting through the noise of the mill.

Fleming glanced at his watch. "That's the work train coming in with the logging crew."

"How far out are they cutting?" Stan asked.

"About seven miles, isn't it?" Murton hunched his shoulders in a vain attempt to loosen his coat that had soaked clear through.

Fleming nodded.

An old fashioned engine trailing two flatcars loaded with workmen puffed onto a nearby siding and stopped. Some of the men jumped off before the train stopped rolling and hurried away to a group of the raw pine dwellings on the other side of the track. The others formed into silent groups and stood looking curiously at Murton, Fleming and Stan.

"That's a tough looking crowd," Stan said.

"And from where I'm sitting they don't look very friendly, either," Murton added uncomfortably. "You might think I was setting fire to my own lumber."

Stan suppressed a quick desire to ask. "Are you?" He'd run into cases like that before, but this one just didn't seem to fit the pattern.

Murton raised his arm and waved a greeting to the fifty odd men. There was no answering gesture. Some shifted lunchboxes under their arms and moved away indifferently. The rest continued to stare stonily.

"They must have heard about Lafe." Fleming wet his lips apprehensively.

"What makes you think they haven't?" Burton turned on his heel. "You don't need a telegraph line to reach a wood's crew. Let's go!"

They walked down a wide sand strip by the tracks and past the unpainted warehouse that housed the commissary. Stan glanced through the door. Long rows of shelves behind the counters held the necessities of the isolated community—usually sold at a price slightly higher than they could be bought in any supermarket.

Three men and a couple of women were around the inevitable Coca-Cola vending machine inside the door. The sun had dropped behind the trees. Shadows had grown black and long. The pine walls of the commissary, and the houses in the white and Negro quarters—so pointedly set apart from each other—had sucked up the heat of the day and would radiate it all night long.

"Something out of the middle ages," Stan thought. "Anywhere else people would be gathered in an air-conditioned cocktail bar, not in a steaming commissary." Here the streets were sand alleys; the houses were prison huts; and the passions of the people who lived in such barren grounds were just as raw, just as primitive, just as ready to flash into flame. Like some nightmare of Dali's on canvas—it was there, but appallingly unreal.

Then, of a sudden, there was a strident hum of mosquitoes in the air, and the low voices of the group around the coke machine were reaching Stan clearly:

"Lafe's just the first—"

"I'm for hauling tail out o' here—ef'n I knowed where to go—"

"Hain't no place ter go. Mought as well be kilt while yer on a payroll right here."

The mill had shut down. Silence had rushed in to fill the place of clamor. It struck at Stan with the force of a blow.

They turned left around the commissary down a narrow sand lane where identical square houses seemed to hang together seeking company for their misery.

Fleming stopped at one of them and knocked on the door.

It was opened promptly by a pleasant looking boy in his late teens. He was neatly dressed in clothes that marked him as an office worker. He wore a flat-top cut to his brown hair. His eyes fixed themselves on Stan and stayed there.

"Oh, hello, Harry." Fleming turned to Stan and Murton. "This is Harry Wilson. He helps Mrs. King in the office. I sent him over here to sort of look after Lafe's girl."

Harry Wilson acknowledged the introduction with a nod. They stepped inside the cabin and Stan cringed at the fumed oak furniture long past its prime, the bedraggled hooked rugs, and the cheap handmade curtains that tried vainly to hide the windows where torn mosquito netting took the place of metal screens.

A plain looking girl in her teens sat rocking slowly in a corner of the cheerless room. She didn't look up as they came in.

"Louise, Mr. Murton and Mr. Fleming are here." Harry Wilson walked over and touched her on the arm.

Louise Storrs raised her head wearily and stared at Murton from blue eyes that were red and swollen with weeping. "It's right Christian of youall to come, Mr. Murton. But there ain't nothin' you kin do now that Dad's gone."

"I realize that, Louise," Murton said in a voice that entirely altered Stan's first impressions of the man. His tone was gentle, filled with genuine regret and sympathy, and entirely free of his usual belligerency. "Lafe worked for me. Like any employee of mine, he was part of my responsibility. You're his daughter. I intend to see that you have enough to get along on for a while."

He took out a pocket checkbook, uncapped a fountain-pen, and as Stan watched, trying not to be too obvious, wrote out a check for a thousand dollars and waved it in the air to dry.

Fleming saw the amount along with Stan and his pale face reddened. "But Mr. Murton," he said in a cracked protesting voice. "Do you need to do that? There's Compensation Insurance, you know—"

"Oh, shove it, John!" Murton snapped. "How much is compensation for the death of a father?" He turned to the boy who was watching and listening wide-eyed. "I take it that you and Louise are getting married."

Harry Wilson put an arm protectively around Louise's slim shoulders. "If she'll have me."

"Will you have him, Louise?"

The girl nodded and forced a tremulous smile.

"That's set then," Murton said. "Harry's job in the office is good as long as this mill is running, John." He handed the check to the boy. "Good luck to you both—and use this to start your married life on." Turning away, he motioned toward the door.

"I'd like to ask a couple of questions, Miss Storrs," Stan walked over to the girl and spoke very gently. "You can help us if you feel up to it." He paused. Finally Louise inclined her head. "Did your father ever say anything to you that might give us any idea why he was killed?"

"No." She swallowed hard and turned pale tear-filled eyes up to him. "Father was never one to talk much. He worked late. Then he was tired."

"He never spoke of the fires during the last few weeks? Never said anything about what might have started them?"

She looked at Harry before she answered. Then turned back to Stan and tried to force another smile. "Only in his sleep."

Murton started to say something. Stan cut him off with an impatient snap of his strong fingers. "What did your father say in his sleep, Louise? That might be very important for us to know."

"Well, he always sort of mumbled at night when he was very tired. But the last couple of nights he kept saying the same thing over and over out loud. It woke me up in the next room."

"Do you remember what it was?"

"I guess so—but it's silly.

I don't know what it means. Dad kept repeating: 'wood don't burn—wood don't burn'."

Stan glanced at Harry Wilson. The boy was standing by her chair doodling with a pencil and a scrap of paper on the table. Wilson felt Stan's gaze, looked up quickly and said: "That's right—wood don't burn. That's what Louise told me."

"That's all you can think of, Louise?"

"Yes, that's all. That's not much help, is it?"

"Maybe so. Maybe not. Thanks a lot, anyway." Stan started toward the door where Murton and Fleming were waiting. He had only taken a couple of steps when Harry Wilson blocked his way.

"You're the Stan Rice who cleaned up that mess with the sheriff's office last year in Lake City, aren't you?"

"Yes," Stan admitted with a grin. "Don't tell me I'm famous enough for you to remember me."

"You got my father out of a jam. Enoch Wilson. He and my mother live there. They won't forget you."

"Well, thanks again—and remember me to your parents when you see them."

The boy had tucked a piece of paper swiftly into the upper pocket of Stan's brown shirt where he kept his cigarettes and lighter. Stan touched his forehead in a quick salute and followed Murton and Fleming out into the almost unbreathable evening air.

"What do you make of that wood don't burn business?" Murton asked after a few steps.

"Another piece of a puzzle," Stan said, "People say queer things when they're sleep-talking. Maybe, later, I can fit it in."

They turned right and in front of the commissary stopped short. A group of workmen were standing at the foot of the wide steps that led up to the loading platform which formed an uncovered porch to the building. The twilight was deepening fast. Lights had gone on throwing a patch of yellow on the platform and sand in front of the commissary's wide double door. An ominous silence hung over the group at sight of Stan and the two men with him.

"I don't like this," Fleming said in a flat voice. "Do either of you have a gun?"

"I have," Stan said. Then added, "But it's in my car."

"This is a hell of a time to joke, Rice!" Murton said angrily under his breath. "Those men mean trouble!"

"That's fast thinking, Chum," Stan said. "If you want to start the final scene of a grade-B movie—just let one of us pull a gun. You two stand right here. I have a hunch that I'm the joker they're laying for. I'll see."

He walked quickly forward keeping his eyes on a tall dark-faced man with a stubbly beard whose dirty torn T-shirt was strained tight over a barrel chest. He was less than twenty feet from the group when the big man pushed the others aside and strode to meet him.

Stan slowed his pace, but kept forward until the workman planted himself flatfooted in Stan's path. Only when the reddened eyes were close to his own did Stan realize what a colossus he'd blithely taken on for a showdown. Well, it was his own fault! Nobody had asked him to choose this way of making a living—and he was, like this gorilla facing him, taking Murton's pay.

"Howdy, friend!" Stan said pleasantly. "I'm Stan Rice. You seem to want to talk things over. I'd suggest we could do it more comfortably if you'd move your face just a little farther away."

"Hah!" The man gave Stan a whiff of breath so loaded with 'shine it would have made a gopher fly. He was not only big, he was drunk as a skunk, Stan thought with an inward sigh. He clasped Stan's shoulder with a hand strong enough to uproot a pine tree and pulled him closer.

"I knows well enuff who you are, Buster. I'm Hal Skelly, Woods Foreman—an' you're jest another one o' them investigators Murton's sent here to stir up trouble 'n' spy. Well, we're sick 'o' the likes 'o' you."

"And what am I supposed to do?" Stan asked still keeping his pleasant tone.

"Blow!" The word gave Stan another treatment of shine. "If'n you ain't gone from this mill in an hour, I'm goin' to take my thumb 'n' dig out your purty eye!"

"Hold it, Skelly!" John Fleming spoke sharply from beside Stan. "You're acting like an idiot. Where do you think it's going to get you?"

"Oh, pipe down, Fleming," a voice advised from the crowd. The men began to move in closer.

"Yeah, is Murton chicken?" another asked. "Can't he talk for hisself no more?"

"You're damned right I can!" the millowner shouted furiously from the other side of Stan. "I'll fire the whole—"

Stan gave a lightening twist that freed him from Skelly's hand and whirled on the two. "Get lost!" he snapped. "Both of you! You'll fire noone, Murton. Can't you see that's just what someone wants—to have you shut this mill down. Now fade. This muscle-bound baboon, Skelly, wants to gouge out my eye. Maybe we'll all feel better if I let him try!" Stan whirled again to face Skelly. "Maybe *you're* chicken, Gargantua. Come on and take my eye! Or are you too potted to try?"

Skelly's stubbled chin dropped giving his face an expression of foolish amazement. One of the men behind him snickered. Skelly towered half a head over Stan and must have outweighed him by over a hundred pounds.

"Are you *lookin'* for a fight, Skinny?" he asked unbelievingly.

"I don't like morons who call me 'Buster'," Stan told him. "Furthermore, I'm a law-abiding citizen and resent stews who avoid paying taxes by getting potted on shine. Then to avoid being called 'skinny'—I'm ready to die. Also you stink like a mink."

Stan eyed the corded muscles swelling under Skelly's T-shirt. The big man was so astonished that he stood undecided. "Of course you can always apologize nicely," Stan added with a smile.

Someone in the crowd indulged in a large ripe raspberry. It was followed by a loud guffaw. It might have been meant for Stan, but Skelly, building up pressure from the warmth of Stan's mocking smile took razz and guffaw both personally and in a big way. He blew his top completely.

"I'll git both your eyes, you

— — —!" He charged with a string of first class logger's expletives that sent sulphur up to the sky.

Stan hated fighting with a drunken man but this wasn't a time for niceties. Skelly, drunk or sober, was quite a hunk of man. More dangerous than a charging bull. This had to be fast—unless Stan had really meant it when he'd boasted that he was ready to die. This was going to take a combination of all Stan's semi-pro boxing skill plus all the judo and just plain barroom fighting he knew. He offered up a silent prayer that he hadn't goofed in goading this wildman, and that he really had enough on the ball to see it through.

He sidestepped like a shadow and banged both fists into Skelly's stubbly face, with all his hundred and ninety pounds behind them, in a quick one-two.

It wasn't enough. Skelly never missed a stride. He turned around in a lumbering circle much faster than Stan expected and charged again his mighty arms flailing. One thing at least had been accomplished, the camp needed blood to let off steam and Skelly's red nose was flattened and streaming gore.

"You slimy bastard—stay in one place and fight like a man," he bellowed. "I'm goin' to put the boots to you!"

Stan saved his breath. He had no desire to be stomped to death with a lumberman's boots. If Skelly ever got a grip on him with those ice-tong hands—. Hell, he'd just said what he would do!

Stan didn't try his fists again. This wasn't any prize fight—it was a drag-'em-out sawmill brawl. Bite 'em! Blind 'em! Winner take all!

He let Skelly's charge get plenty of speed by dancing backwards before it. When the moment was right, he twisted like a spider monkey and gave him the elbow full force in the pit of Skelly's stomach. It was much like stopping a runaway mule. A wall of boiler-plate muscles sent excruciating pains telegraphing up Stan's arm from his funny-bone.

With Skelly's weight and Stan's combined the collision would have killed any ordinary citizen, but Skelly was far from an ordinary citizen. Still, it had an effect. Skelly released a blast of alcoholic

fumes that could be smelled ten feet away and doubled over. Stan picked a place on the back of Skelly's lobster neck and cracked down with a judo blow that nearly crushed the edge of his hand.

Skelly went down, rolled over, started to get to his feet, then changed his mind and relaxed with one hand under his head, lying comfortably still.

An angry murmur started among the men. A few began to press forward. Skelly turned his head, wiped blood from his chin and gave them a ferocious scowl.

"You apes keep out of this," he said fiercely. "You saw what happened to me—and I can lick you all. I know when I'm beat." He looked up at Stan. "You said you wanted to talk, young-feller. Well, why don't you talk?" He used one finger to remove more blood from his upper lip. Then, under the finger his irregular tobacco-stained teeth revealed themselves in a grimace that Stan decided could be nothing else than a friendly grin.

"Let's just say we're both beat, Skelly." Stan returned the grin and stretched out his hand to help Skelly to his feet. "I'm just a faster runner than you. I had to be. If you ever got your hands on me you'd break me in two. You're the Woods' Foreman, aren't you?"

Skelly wiped his mouth with a hairy forearm. "I'm supposed to be—yuh don't know what y'are 'round here any more."

"How come?"

"Lately I bin loadin' trucks. Cripes knows what fur."

"Loading trucks?" Burgess Murton and Fleming had moved up closer in back of Stan. "What trucks, Hal?"

"How w'ud I know, Mr. Murton? Lafe Storrs gimme the orders. I do what I'm tolt 'round here." He pointed a finger at Fleming. "Ast him."

"There's nothing to that," Fleming said quickly. "Some outfit out in the woods from Davenport—Cagle's Mills—has been sending a couple of trucks up here to buy up lumber that isn't up to passing grade. Instead of feeding it to the hog we sell it to them for a few bucks, that's all."

"Cagle's Mills?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's damn funny," Murton said after a short hesitation. "I never heard of them, and I thought I knew every wildcat mill and yard in the state. God knows, since these fires, to make up my orders, I've had to buy from them all."

The purple of twilight turned to black. One instant the silhouette of the pine trees and the skeleton structure of the mill had been sharp against the sky. The next instant everything but the yellow light from the commissary door had vanished as though some celestial hand had dumped a giant inkpot over it all.

Unconsciously, the group of millhands huddled closer together, and Murton and Fleming moved nearer to Stan. In the yellow glare the faces of the workmen looked worried, tired and maybe afraid—but c e r t a i n l y not vengeful or mean.

"Well, that's that," Stan said. "So you had to load trucks, Skelly. Now what other beefs do you have from the men?"

"Murton knows what's eatin' us," one of the men said. "What's goin' to happen—?"

"Shut up!" Skelly growled. "I'll do the talkin'. Four mill fires—all without cause. Men put on jobs that ain't their own. Investigators prowling around, asking questions—comin' unasked right into yer home. And now a rotten killin'—." He paused. "An' now you're snoopin' around. Ain't that enuf?"

"Yes," Stan said. "It's a barrel-full." He raised his voice addressing the men. "Also it's the reason I'm snoopin' around. I'm asking you for twenty-four hours so I can find Lafe Storrs' killer—twenty-four hours to stop whatever's been going on."

"How you figger to do it?" Skelly asked him.

"That's my job, Hal. Your job is to see that the men go quietly to work tomorrow and leave this thing to me. I'll take care of it."

Skelly rubbed his swelling eye, fingered the drying blood on his lip and chin, and said: "Reckon you kin do hit, ef'n anyone kin." He turned to the men. "Let's git home and git some chow."

One by one they drifted away to be swallowed by the darkness.

Murton said. "Speaking of

chow—I saw Crandall headed for your bungalow some time ago, John. That's where you'll have to sleep and eat, Mr. Rice, and I'm afraid that our supper is getting cold by now."

Stan reached idly into his shirt pocket and fingered his lighter and cigarettes.

"You two go ahead," he said. "Put some supper in the warmer for me. I have to get something from my car. I won't be long."

"Your gun, eh?" Murton asked.

"Might be," Stan told him. He didn't tell him that without a doubt the note that Harry Wilson had slipped so quickly into his pocket was gone.

Either Murton or Fleming could have filched it, but it was much more probable that he had lost it during his bout with Skelly. Or was it? Wouldn't his lighter and cigarettes have dropped out at the same time?

He lengthened his stride and hastened over to the cleared place beside the office where his Olds convertible made a lighter patch in the darkness. His flashlight and gun—a .38 Colt on a .45 frame—were in the glove locker of his car.

Opening it with a key on the chain that held the ignition key and identification tag, he took out the flashlight and shone light in on the gun. It was in a clip armpit holster. A light sport's jacket lay on the front seat. The jacket would conceal the harness that held the holster under his arm, but Stan didn't want to put it on. Finally, he freed the gun from the holster, looked to the loading, and shoved it through the opening of his khaki shirt down into his waistband.

A few minutes later he was playing the torch over the scuffed-up ground in front of the commissary. It didn't take long to assure himself that the note hadn't fallen there. Whistling tunelessly between his teeth, he set off for Lafe Storrs' house.

A couple of men, standing on the platform outside the commissary door, broke their conversation briefly as Stan went by. Subdued lights from curtained windows made patches on the sand. A TV blared from one of the cabins. A clatter of dishes came from another one.

"Grim!" Stan thought. "Pretty grim! But at least they have television today. What the devil would you do for night-life in a god-forsaken place like this without it? Thirty miles to a drive-in picture show!"

Louise Storrs answered his knock on the door.

"Sorry to bother you again." Stan smiled into her pale upturned face. "Is Harry Wilson here?"

"No. He's gone." She stepped aside. "Won't you come in?"

"Just for a moment." He came in and closed the door. "You may be able to help me."

"Anything."

"Harry shoved a note into my pocket just as I was leaving here. Did he mention anything about it to you?"

"Didn't you read it?"

"I didn't get a chance, Louise. When I looked for it, it was gone."

"But it was important. It—" Her blue eyes widened.

"Then you do know what it said?"

"Only that he wanted to meet you tonight somewhere—"

"Why?"

Louise shook her head slowly, trying to think. "He wanted to tell you something—something he thought it might be dangerous for me to know. That is, after what happened to—"

Stan automatically lit a cigarette and dragged the smoke down gratefully. It struck him that not only was he missing his supper, but he hadn't had a smoke in hours. Murton had impressed on him that he'd clamped down tight on smoking around the mill.

"If you could just remember, Louise. What time did he want to meet me—and whereabouts. Was it in the lumber yard? The office? Somewhere in the sawmill?"

"Oh, it was somewhere in the lumber yard, I know—but he didn't tell me the number of the pile. But it was at nine o'clock, I know."

Stan groaned. There were five hundred stacks of lumber drying on sticks. They covered several acres in back of the mill. "Well, the fact that it was nine o'clock is something, Louise."

"Please find him," she said. "I'm worried."

Stan looked at a cheap alarm on the table. It was ten past eight. "I'll find him—

and quit worrying—" He broke off and ground out his cigarette in a saucer on the table. Reflected in a framed mirror on the wall he had seen the indistinct outlines of a man's face through the netting at the window. It had been there just long enough for him to recognize the tobacco chewing Foreman, Clay Boland.

"And I mean quit worrying," he went on quite casually. "Isn't there anyone who can stay here with you?"

"You find Harry," Louise said. "I'll be all right, Mr. Rice. Mrs. King, from the office, will be over in a little while to watch a TV show. She can spend the night with me."

"Fine!" Stan said. "And I'll find Harry. You can be sure." He went out, and after taking a look around the house that revealed exactly nothing, headed for the office again. Five hundred stacks of lumber—a ghost city of jet black narrow sand alleys. Sure, I'll find Harry—dead or alive—I'm sure! He hoped his luck was as big as his mouth!

When the screen door had closed softly behind him, he stiffened for a second before switching his torch on. It wasn't any blacker in the office than it was outside, but that was all he could say. Why did people speak of darkest Africa? Nothing in the world was darker than the swamps and backwoods of Florida on a moonless night. No reflected glow of lights from a town or city. Overhead foliage shutting out most of the stars, if there were any, and the tiny ones that managed now and again to peep through seemed eighteen trillion miles away.

The yellow ray of his torch stabbed around the reception room and led him in to Fleming's desk. He started to switch on the desk light when he remembered Clay Boland's face at Louise Storrs' window. Instead of setting himself up for a target, he clicked off the torch. Sitting in blackness he reached for the telephone.

Ten seconds of listening for a dial tone plus a dozen jiggles of the hook convinced him that the only phone in the camp was dead. He swore softly, cradled the mouthpiece and leaned back in Fleming's swivel chair.

Four fires and a brutal killing—for what? A few fast bucks made from some trucks of stolen boards? Even Lafe Storrs, a part time Deputy Sheriff, hadn't been able to swallow that one. Stan wanted information, and he wanted it fast—that's why he was about to call his old friend Jack Sanderson, Editor of the Jacksonville Herald. There was heavy sugar—real big dough—connected with the caper around this decrepit sawmill. But the answer wasn't here—and somebody knew that as well as Stan. Result: one cut telephone.

Stan grinned. They should watch their TV shows more closely—or maybe they thought they were playing with children. For five years now he had had a powerful ship-to-shore telephone set up in the trunk of his car.

He pushed back his chair and started to rise. A light flipped on in the outer office. Stan sank back again, one hand on the butt of his gun. The angular form of Mrs. King appeared in the door.

"Mr. Rice?"

"Yes."

"I have a message for you from Mr. Murton. A phone call came in just after you left here with him and Mr. Fleming. His youngest girl is ill. He's already left for Kissimmee. He'll be back early in the morning."

"Thanks," Stan said. "The call must have come in before the wires were cut on this phone."

"That seems rather obvious, Mr. Rice." Her voice was brittle. She hesitated, fiddling with the bun at the back of her hair. "If you're sitting in the dark for fear Clay Boland is going to shoot you—you're wrong."

"Thanks," Stan said again. "Am I to take it that he's just a harmless peeping Tom?"

"He's keeping an eye on Louise because I asked him to, that's all. We saw you go in her house—"

"And like all the other people around here, you don't trust me. Is that it?"

"Mr. Murton's the only one we trust, Mr. Rice—and even he may fold up on us, the way they're laying things on."

Stan wished he could see her face better. "If you know, you might tell me—who's

laying what on whom, and why."

"You're not very bright about sawmills—"

"I've made most of my living around ginmills, Mrs. King. Sawmills depress me. The lack of lights and music and telephones. Particularly, this one. Now, you were saying—?"

"Four fires. Suspicious origin for all. Four investigations—and full insurance paid promptly on them all. What does that look like to you?"

"Like the Florida Pine Insurance Co. is a good one to insure with," Stan told her promptly.

"That's why I said you weren't so bright. It makes Mr. Crandall's company have wings—and that's exactly what it's supposed to do."

"Just why?"

"So that Mr. Murton can't get insurance with any other company when the Florida Pine Insurance Company cancels their policies day after tomorrow. No other company will touch this mill with such a record—"

"But what of the other investigators—surely if they'd found anything wrong the company wouldn't have paid up in full—"

"You snapped that one up quick enough, Mr. Rice." Mrs. King took a step farther into the room. "Investigators my eye! I've worked around sawmills since I was a little girl. I was born in one. Not one of those four adjustors could tell kerosene from gasoline. They were goons sent here to stir up more trouble—so Mr. Murton would have to shut down this mill, even if he was crazy enough to keep it running carrying all the insurance on his own. That's the one thing Mr. Murton will never do."

"But it can't be making that much money," Stan said thoughtfully. "Why won't he shut it down?"

Mrs. King slapped her hollow chest. "People like me, and like Fleming, and Lafe Storrs, and Skelly that you fought with tonight. Everybody working here, white and black. We're sawmill hands. Old timers. Mills are being built with automation and electronics, today. This mill has been losing money steadily, but Mr. Murton is different from most folks. He has all the money he needs or

wants, and he doesn't give a damn. He keeps this mill running because he knows that none of us are familiar with new-fangled machinery or production. Not one person working here—and the day he closes it every last man-jack of us will finish up on the county relief rolls, or on the town."

"But why in the name of Heaven—?" Stan pushed back the chair and got to his feet.

"Would anyone want him to shut it down? I can't answer that question, Mr. Rice. It's to get that answer that Mr. Murton brought you here." Mrs. King turned wearily and Stan listened to her feet as they crossed the outside room and went out through the office door.

He followed quickly. Before he switched off the light Mrs. King had left on he glanced at the wall clock. It was twenty to nine. Mrs. King had probably told him the same things that Harry Wilson had in mind. Nevertheless, somewhere in the lumber piles in twenty minutes he had to meet that boy. Harry might have the answer that Mrs. King couldn't supply: How anyone could find a profit in shutting a worn-out wreck of a pine mill down. There wasn't time to call Sanderson on the ship-to-shore right now.

As it turned out, he'd already sliced his time to the danger point when he found the boy.

He started with the first alley between the stacks of boards that towered above him sixteen feet high. His light wouldn't penetrate more than half-way. The numbered signs at the foot of each stack were no help since he didn't know which he was looking for. The only answer was to traverse the length of each alley, calling Wilson's name softly. It would take an hour to walk them all. Stan took the first one on the run.

The boards had trapped in more heat than the houses. The air was thick, acrid with the pungent smell of resin and drying pine. His voice sounded puny and futile, closed in tight with the sound of his flying feet plop-plopping against the impeding sand.

In the third corridor another flashlight met his own, streaming into his eyes—but

not before Stan had seen that his middle was frighteningly close to the muzzle of a sawed-off ten-gauge shotgun. He stopped so abruptly his feet threw up a tiny shower of sand.

A white-haired old man in dungarees with a watchman's clock slung over one shoulder peered at Stan through steel-rimmed spectacles. "Yo're in an all-fired hurry! Whatchu runnin' from, son?"

"I'm looking for Harry Wilson who works in the office," Stan blurted out, catching his breath. "Do you know him? And please lower that elephant gun!"

" 'Tis right big, hain't hit? Oncet I shot a skunk with hit—never left hair nor hide 'o' th' scaper, 'ceptin' th' smell. Takes more to kill skunk-stink 'n' ary gun. How duh I know yuh ain't a skunk, son? We've had us quite a run!"

Butterflies fluttered delicately in Stan's stomach and sharp prickles marched up and down along his spine. "Look, Pop, Harry Wilson asked me to meet him in these lumber piles at nine o'clock. I don't know what for, and he didn't say where —but it's nearly nine now and the kid may be in danger. I'm Stan Rice, an Investigator that Mr. Murton hired—and if you notice any odor about me it isn't skunk-stink, it's the smell of just plain fear!"

The old man peered closer. "Yup. Seems as how I place yuh now. Yo're thet skinny toe-dancer thet took old Skelly." He gave a toothless grin, clicked on the safety and slowly lowered the menacing muzzle. "Best danged fight I seen in a year. C'mon, son. Harry tol' me yuh wuz meetin' him. Ast me not ter shoot yuh. C'mon! He's quite a piece f'um here."

The old man led the way with astonishing speed—out to the edge of the lumber piles, then past endless stacks until his light lit up the last alley away from the mill. As they turned in a pencil flash flicked out half-way down the corridor.

The watchman promptly darkened his own torch and put out a hand stopping Stan in his tracks.

"Harry?. You there, son?" His voice bounced off of the towering piles. For an overlong minute everything was awesomely still. The safety

clicked loud as a firecracker as the watchman raised his gun.

"I seen yuh, down there!" The old man's voice was strong. "This here is Deke, th' watchman. Better stay where yuh are. Try to run 'n' I'll hear yuh—'n' I'll spray the whole length o' this alley up with buckshot. I got me a sawed-off scatter-gun."

"Hold it, Deke! It's Clay Boland!" The pencil flash turned upward to light the rugged face of the stocky mill foreman. "Louise sent me down here to find her boy." The pencil flash turned down. "Somebody got to him first."

"Is he dead?" Stan asked as he and the old man ran forward.

"I don't think so, but take a look."

The three torches combined. Harry Wilson's flat-top hair cut was a mass of blood. "'T'aint purty, is it?" Boland asked in his gravelly voice. "Somebody's worked him over with a two-by-four."

"Somebody's working the whole sawmill over," said Stan. He knelt by the boy and gently felt in his hair. "Concussion. Maybe a fractured skull. Is there a doctor here?"

Clay Boland snorted. "Mrs. King is the nearest thing to it. She'd pour iodine down your neck if you cut your head off, but she makes a try."

It was quarter to ten when Stan and Boland staggering under Harry's weight got him on the bed in Louise Storrs' house, and under the first aid of the girl and Mrs. King.

Stan waited impatiently while Mrs. King surveyed Harry's injuries and carefully washed away the clotted blood. "There's really nothing much I can do," Mrs. King said rather hopelessly. "I'd suggest that we get Mr. Crandall to drive him to the hospital in Kissimmee—but I'm afraid he might die jouncing over sand roads between here and the highway in a car."

"I'll get an ambulance," Stan said firmly. "It will be here in an hour, and a surgeon with it." He might have added: "and the sheriff, too!" He'd never seen a place, even in TV westerns, that was more in need of a little law.

Mrs. King looked up from bending over Harry. "But the

phone?"

"Don't worry about it." Stan patted her bony shoulder. "Normally, I'm a fun-loving fellow, not too bright about sawmills—but tonight I've been pushed too far. I'm not going to use smoke signals to get help for Harry. I have a ship-to-shore radio telephone in my car."

He passed Fleming's bungalow, the only sand and stucco building around the mill, on his way to make his call from the car. At least the superintendent did well for himself. The one story house was a mansion compared to the hovels that the mill hands called home.

Stan took a quick look under a half-lowered venetian blind. The sitting-room. Crandall's portly figure was stretched out in an easy chair, a highball beside him, absorbed in the show on an expensive console TV. A small grand-piano shimmered under a lamp in the corner. There was light-gray wall-to-wall carpeting on the floor. Bottles and glasses glistened on a portable bar.

Stan moved on indulging himself briefly in his inaudible tuneless whistle. Nothing made sense. Nothing fitted. John Fleming had a sinecure in his job as superintendent, regardless of what salary Murton was paying him. He'd be the last to tolerate any petty rackets that might throw him out with the others by closing down the mill.

It was five past ten when Stan, fighting voracious mosquitoes, got the Tampa Operator on his SS phone. He cut into her, "Please stand by Florida 9G2XY—"

"Semi-Mayday, Operator. This is Florida 9G2XY, Stan Rice, State's Attorney's Office. Emergency. Can you read me?"

"I'm reading you clearly, 9G2XY. I have a line clear for your semi-Mayday call. Over."

"I want to talk personally to Steve Rankin, Sheriff of Osceola County, either at his office or his home in Kissimmee. After that, please stand by for another call to Jack Sanderson, Editor of the Jacksonville Herald. Get him personally, either at his office or his home. Do you read me? Over."

"You're coming in clearly, 9G2XY. By the time you've finished talking with the

sheriff, I'll try to have Mr. Sanderson standing by. I'm ringing Kissimmee. Please stand by."

Two minutes later, while the mosquitoes feasted, Sheriff Rankin's voice bellowed out from the speaker: "What the hell are you into now, Stan? Are you shipwrecked at sea?"

Stan pressed the talking button on his mouthpiece. "Shut up and listen, Steve. I'm at M u r t o n ' s Pine Mill No. 4. Know where it is? I'm talking on my auto radiophone. Over."

"I know where it is. What's the beef? Over."

It took less than a minute to give Sheriff Rankin a run down. When Stan concluded with an "over and out!" he was confident that an ambulance with a doctor for Harry Wilson, and the sheriff with two deputies would soon be speeding on their way.

The calm efficient operator had already located Jack Sanderson at his home, and was ready with the Jacksonville call.

"Stan!" The familiar voice was warm with greeting. "Glad to hear from you, boy. Need money again?"

"Just information, Jack." Stan found himself gazing hypnotized at the end front window of the nearby office. Either he was going colorblind, or the window was alternately c h a n g i n g from black to red and black again, lighted from inside by a sullen glow. "What do you know about Murton's Pine Mill, No. 4? I'm calling from there on my auto radiophone. Over."

Sanderson laughed. "It's a joke, Stan. Murton's hobby, or folly. An old folks home. Why? Over."

A flame licked up inside of the office window. "Think about it, Jack—anything, everything! I'll call you back within an hour. Some sabotage is under way to close this joint. See if you can think what gives! Right now I have to sign off and move my Olds. It's right beside the office—and the office is burning down. Over and out!"

He drove the Olds to the shelter of a fringe of trees a safe distance away without putting the lid of the trunk down. Yelling "Fire! Fire!" at the top of his lungs, he galloped back and took a look

into Fleming's office through the screened window.

The door to Fleming's office stood open. Stan could see plenty to know that the front room was already an impassable inferno. Flames were climbing swiftly up the fat pine wall boards and licking at the ceiling.

Blistering heat and choking smoke struck at Stan's face through the mesh of the screen, irregularly, but with the swift staccato of a boxer's blows. Then a pinkish light, growing brighter every second lit up the figure of a man with feet and wrists tightly bound lying prone in front of Fleming's desk. A handkerchief knotted behind his neck held a gag in place. The top of his head was toward the window. Stan needed no second look to identify John Fleming by the lines of scalp showing through the sparseness of the slicked down hair.

Stan didn't want a hero's medal, and he had no great love for the whining Super. Love or not, he knew damn well he had less than five minutes to get inside and get Fleming out. More time than that and both of them could be broiled alive in there.

Always presuming that Fleming wasn't cooked to a turn already!

Stan turned and raced for his car again, snatched a hunting knife from its scabbard where it hung beneath the dashboard, and flew back, his long legs pistoning to tackle the screen.

The metal mesh cut out like cheese as he swept the blade around the window frame. The increased draft when the screen was removed brought a blast of heat from the reception room that stopped him for a second with one leg over the window sill.

The shouts of men running from all directions came nearer. An electric siren started its warning wail from the top of the mill. Stan held his breath and went on in.

A tongue of flame snaked around the door jamb, stabbed at Fleming's right foot and before Stan could move, the cuff of Fleming's right pants-leg smoked and began to burn.

A five gallon carboy of spring-water stood upended in a cooler. Stan leaped for it, noticing with thanks that

it was three-quarters full. He grabbed it out and let the water flow over Fleming from head to foot quenching the smoldering pants-leg; trickling a stream on the handkerchief over Fleming's mouth until it was soaked through.

By the time he had put the empty carboy down, picked up his knife and cut the heavy lumber twine that had bitten into Fleming's flesh, Stan found he was gasping like a fish. His own clothes were at the point of smoking, clinging to his body, brittle and dry.

Fleming gasped and groaned when Stan cut the handkerchief, turned him face up and removed the knot that had gagged him. His eyes flickered open to stare uncomprehendingly at Stan.

"Can you get on your feet, Fleming? Quick. Make a try."

Fleming pulled his knees up painfully and let them drop again. He shook his head, then closed his eyes. Stan coughed and said, "Goddam!"

More flames snaked in around the door jamb. Higher now. Two men appeared at the window outside, black against the frame.

"Hey! Anybody in there?"

"Just us chickens—nearly fried to a turn!" Stan said between coughs. "But stick around fellers—I'm passing out what's left of a man!"

He lifted Fleming's shoulders, dragged him to the window, and watched as the two hefty millhands each seized an arm and pulled the limp body over the sill.

"Anyone else?"

"Just me." Stan flung one leg out, balanced astride and gulped in air. He tried but found that the other leg refused to follow. The night air swam with gorgeous black and yellow dots. It was wonderful. "I think I'd like a drink of Scotch, or maybe beer," he said. Willing hands caught him tenderly as he toppled out over the sill.

The nauseating taste and the rasp of Florida moonshine trickling down his burning throat brought Stan around. His head was resting against Hal Skelly's knee. He was just in time to see the office collapse in a flaming pyre. A hand-pulled chemical engine was pumping a futile

stream into the flames. The flickering faces of men and women standing at a safe distance watched helplessly.

"Yuh okay, Buster?" Skelly offered another drink from the bottle he was holding. "This here's 'stilled from lighter knots 'n' turpentine." He had a beautiful mouse on his left eye.

"It's the turps that give it that distinctive flavor, Hal." Stan waved the bottle away, pushed himself to a sitting position and looked at his wrist watch. Ten thirty, lacking a couple of minutes. Sheriff Rankin and the ambulance couldn't possibly make it before eleven, maybe later. The office had gone up like a celluloid ball.

"I'm fine, Hal." Stan scrambled to his feet, feeling a trifle dizzy, but that was all. "I must have eaten some smoke. The thing is: what about Fleming?"

Skelly upended the bottle and tossed it away. "Mebbe a mite sunburnt—but he made hit to th' bungalow on both feet 'n' movin' under his own steam—thanks to yuh. Reckon he's turned in."

"I don't blame him," Stan said. "That's what I want to do. Stick with lumbering, Hal. Investigators have to be alert and keen." He turned with a wave and walked off toward his car.

He found his electric torch, that he'd never expected to see again, lying by the radiophone in the open trunk. It was quarter to eleven when Jack Sanderson's voice over the airwaves from Jacksonville told him in emphatic fashion: "There's only one reason for trouble there, Stan. Nobody's trying to get Burgess Murton to close that pensioners' paradise—they're trying to make things so hot for him that when he gets a reasonable offer, which will be promptly forthcoming after he's beaten to a pulp, he'll *sell!*"

"Sell, Jack? You mean there's uranium under this mill?"

"Not uranium—a c r e a g e. Eighty-five thousand lovely acres of piney woods, half cut over, half with virgin and second growth pine. It all belongs to the Mill #4 Corporation. It all goes along with it—if Murton can be forced to sell."

Stan jabbed the button on his mouthpiece. "Acreage!"

He made a noise with his lips that traveled out over the ether. "What the hell good is the acreage without the mill?"

"Maybe you haven't heard of the Florida Boom, Stan."

"It busted in 1926."

"Not this one," Sanderson told him pityingly. "This is the boom of the nineteen-sixties. By the eighties every retired couple that's left in the world will be living in Florida. It's here to stay. Lots—ten bucks down and ten a month. Thousands of houses going up every day. Did you ever hear of Cagle's Mills? Over."

Stan swallowed and nodded as though Sanderson could see. "I thought they were a fly-by-night sawmill outfit. They've been buying scrap lumber from here—lumber that was burned, or something. What about them?"

"They're a subsidiary of the Crandall Construction Co.—an outfit that intends to subdivide the whole of Osceola County, and several other counties as soon as they can buy the necessary acreage cheap enough."

"And would a deal like that bring in enough to warrant a murder and damn near burning down a mill?"

"Eighty-five thousand acres subdivided into lots—well, they could bring in—ten thousand an acre profit, say—"

"I'm lousy with zeros, Jack. That's either eight million or eighty-five. It's enough to make the boys get rough either way. Has this Crandall anything to do with the Florida Pine Insurance Co.?"

"A Howard Crandall controls the Florida Pine Insurance, Stan. He's a fast operator and there have been rumors he knows where the syndicate sinks its bodies. The Insurance company owns Crandall Construction. Crandall Construction owns Cagle's Mills—there's more. Do you know this Crandall?"

"We practically sleep in a double bed together," Stan said, "at least that's the plan for tonight. Right now I have to oil my Colt and talk to the guy. There's one more thing—what would a man mean—the Assistant Foreman of a mill like this—by saying 'wood don't burn'? Over."

"Just that, Stan." Sanderson's soft laugh came over

the air. "From what you've said there have been four attempts—five with tonight—to start a real holocaust that would completely wipe out the mill, lumber and all. The lumber's still there. It's almost impossible to wipe out close stacked piles of wet green lumber. My guess is that your man was reassuring himself that there must be some deeper reason for starting those fires. Why don't you ask him?"

"I'd have to get wings, Jack. You can't get Heaven on a radiophone. Thanks, Jack. You've helped stop up the hole in my head. I'm on my way. Over and out!"

There were no reflections through the woods that might indicate that the ambulance and sheriff's car were on their way.

There were no lights on in the bungalow. Stan paused on the porch before he went in. The still burning office had lent a scorching sting to the air even that far away.

So Potbelly Crandall was the answer. He could just as well have been at the mill as anyone else the night before and tangled with Lafe—met Lafe in some secluded spot like the catwalk by the trough conveyor that led to the hog. Maybe offered Lafe dough then cracked him with a two-by-four, the same blunt instrument that had been used on Harry Wilson. Easy to dispose of a weapon like that around a mill—as easy as disposing of a body!

Dump body and weapon in the conveyor trough. Go down stairs and throw the switch that started the hog and conveyor. Everything was electrified except the big saws and the log hoist that had to do the heavy work. They were the only parts of the mill that operated on steam.

Kachoff! Eighty-five million pounds of heavy sugar and one lousy Deputy Sheriff standing in the way. What had Clay Boland said: "Nobody would'a' seen it, 'cept the man is sick whose 'sposed to dump it out for the furnaces every day."

There were goose pimples on Stan's arm and hand as he pulled the Colt from his waistband, opened the front screen door, and went like a stalking bobcat into the hall.

The first door on the left

was open—the one just opposite to the living-room. Stan listened briefly to breathing coming from the bed, then flicked on his torch and just as quickly flicked it off.

Fleming lay in nothing but shorts, his stringy back toward the door. His head looked almost bald with the rumpled hair.

Stan moved on to the next room on his left and put an ear to the closed door. An alarm clock ticked loudly inside. A muffled pop came from the direction of the burning office and gave him a start. It was followed by a yell from the crowd that might have been derisive cheers. He could picture a tower of sparks and cinders sky-rocketing upward to die in the air.

He knew he should wait for Steve Rankin to arrive and deal with Crandall—and just as surely he knew how cozy Howard Crandall had played the game. Everybody in the mill had been put under suspicion. Crandall would have the mill sold to him and a million dollars worth of houses built on the site before the sheriff's investigations got him anywhere.

Stan transferred his gun to the hand that held his torch and grinned mirthlessly at the unresponsive door. He'd fallen in love with a bunch of crackers—including Hal Skelly and Mrs. King. If it was going to take a little illegal pistol whipping to help them keep their jobs—well, damn it all, that was just too bad! For a long time now, multi-million dollar goons and murderers like Crandall, hiding behind the skirts of legitimate business, had been getting in his yellow hair!

He twisted the knob without a sound and just as quietly opened the door. Howard Crandall, big-shot real estate mogul, lay naked, face down, his portly stomach resting on a blood drenched sheet. Caught in the streaming beam of Stan's torch the handle of the carving knife, that protruded from the middle of his well upholstered back, threw a foot long shadow on the opposite wall.

Stan closed the door as softly as he had opened it. However long it took Steve Rankin and his men to arrive they couldn't say that Stan had called them for nothing. Two hundred and fifty

pounds of very dead Crandall would still be right there.

Stan crept down the hall, let the outside screen door bang, and holding the lighted torch before him walked quickly into John Fleming's room. His gun was stuck carelessly into the side of his belt, but it was empty. He'd removed all the cartridges and slipped them in his left hand trouser pocket on the way down the hall from Crandall's room.

Stan closed his fingers on Fleming's shoulder and shook him gently. "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Fleming, but it's important. How are you feeling after coming so close to being broiled?"

Fleming squinted into the torch. "Rice?" His mouth opened slackly. He reached for his horn-rimmed glasses beside the bed and put them on. "I don't know how to thank you—"

"Write a letter to the Carnegie Medal Fund." Stan walked to the door and flicked a wall-switch. A ceiling light came on. He turned and asked: "Who got you?"

"Got me?" Fleming sat up on the edge of the bed, both hands on his knobby knees.

"The fire. Remember? Who trussed you up like a pot-roast and left you to cook while the office burned down?"

Fleming examined his wrists where red lines were still visible from the cord that had cut into his skin. "Why, yes—. Come to think of it, I really don't know. I went into the office. Some one hit me over the head. That's all—"

Stan shone the torch on Fleming's stringy hair. "Could they have sapped you with a two-by-four?"

"Why—I really don't know. Why a two-by-four?"

"The idea just appealed to me. I can't see any marks on your skull and I thought that maybe you were knocked out with a piece of soft pine. Of course, you might have been socked on the jaw."

Fleming gingerly felt his chin. "Yes. That must have been it. My jaw is terribly sore. I don't know how to thank you—"

"We've been into that department before," Stan said. "You may be surprised, but I think I have proof that Howard Crandall tried to burn you—and that he killed Lafe

Storrs. Sheriff Rankin will be here any minute now—I'd like to be able to give him the proof that would send Crandall to the electric chair."

"Crandall!" Fleming stood up and leaned one hand on the foot of the bed. "But Crandall is—"

"An honorable man!" Stan cut in. "He's also damned interested in eighty-five thousand acres of land that belong to this mill. I'm sure that Lafe Storrs found that out—"

"Lafe Storrs maybe—but why would he try to kill me?"

"More terror, that's why," Stan said easily. "Two murders instead of one. Five fires instead of four. Isn't that plenty to make Mr. Murton see the light and sell his holdings in this mill? Now, you can thank me by getting your clothes on and coming with me to get the proof that will nail the stinker."

"What proof is that?" Fleming asked suspiciously.

"A button," Stan said. "A simple little button off of a white shirt, like the ones that you and Crandall wear. Crandall must have come here last night and had a struggle with Storrs and lost that button in the conveyor trough that leads to the hog."

"How do you know?"

"I saw it this afternoon, but it meant nothing to me then."

"You saw it where?"

"It's going round and round—caught in one of the links of the endless conveyor chain. Now it's underneath—and now it's on top moving down the trough toward the hog. All we have to do is start the hog and the conveyor, wait until the button comes round—and we pick out a one way ticket for Crandall to the chair!"

"Button, button, who's got the button?" The childish phrase from the game kept plaguing Stan as he and Fleming walked side by side past the darkened commissary, and houses with an occasional light, on their way to the mill. Behind them figures still stood around the remains of the office, reduced now to a pinkish glow.

He'd played this one by ear, Stan reflected. But didn't you play them all by ear right up until the final mop-up? The man beside him was

just an ordinary fellow. But they were always ordinary fellows when you saw their pictures in the paper: SALESMAN KILLS WIFE AND CHILDREN WITH BASEBALL BAT. God above! He looks like somebody I know! Nice looking chap. Kindly. Come to think of it, he reminds me something of my old pal, Joe!

Fleming didn't look the type who would have the guts to get a carving knife from the kitchen and jam it to the hilt in the back of a sleeping man. Or did he? Stan had to admit that if anyone double-crossed him and left him to burn alive it would make him plenty sore. Fleming was a cringer. If he'd been working in cahoots with Crandall and Crandall had used the old whipsaw on him—getting the better of a person at any price no matter what he does—a knife in the back might very well be the method Fleming would use.

And what about Lafe? That could have been fear—fear of insecurity, of losing his pretty bungalow, of being exposed to Murton as a petty grafter. Fear of the whipsaw of life itself! That had driven weaker men than Fleming into becoming psychopathic killers. Loss of security—that was the whipsaw of life itself—deadlier and more terrorizing than any other saw around the mill!

Well, if I've pulled a booboo this time it sure is a beaut! Stan thought. I've whipsawed myself. When Rankin comes I just wave my arm in one dramatic gesture and tell him to arrest every millhand in sight—because every one of them is scared enough to commit two murders, or even three.

"Throw your light here, Mr. Rice." Fleming stopped at a panel box and opened it with a key. The torch revealed four rows of burnished copper switches. Fleming pushed one in. A clanking came from the floor above on the opposite side of the mill. "The hog and conveyor are operating now. Different machines are often started at night to make repairs. Boland and Storrs both could open this box—in case you were wondering about a key."

"Or Lafe's body could have been left in the conveyor and fed to the hog when the mill started up this morning,"

Stan said. "Getting that button out of the chain is what interests me. Aren't there any more lights in here?"

"Plenty. We'll have twenty men down here on the run to see what's the matter if I turn them on. There's a bulb over the catwalk beside the conveyor trough. It's not very bright—but you'll have to use your torch to find that button in the chain, won't you, Mr. Rice?" He gave a dry nervous cackle that made Stan's skin crawl. "Frankly, I don't see that a button's much proof of anything."

"You haven't kept up with modern police methods, Mr. Fleming. They can almost detect a man's sweat from a button, or even a tiny piece of one. Plenty to tuck a murderer away. Let's go."

"Up those stairs there. They're narrow. You'll have to use the torch and lead the way." His cackle was even more nervous now and his words were tumbling out strung together.

Stan found his own nerves were vibrating strangely. He hoped he hadn't overdone that button routine. The Fleming walking in back of him now was menacing, imminently dangerous. Any slight impetus might start him coming apart at the seams, turn him into a psychotic weakling gone berserk with dread. Once that happened he would attack without warning, bludgeon a man, or knife him in the back and think it was play.

An overhead bulb lit the narrow catwalk barely enough to see. On the left, waist high, was the V-shaped conveyor trough. At its bottom the heavy links of the moving chain. On the right a flimsy guard rail was supposed to prevent a fall to the ground twenty-feet below.

Stan stopped half way out from the side of the mill to the end of the conveyor and with every muscle taut to the point of aching, leaned over and directed the beam of the flash on the moving chain. Scarcely ten links of the chain had passed under the light when he felt the tug at his waistline as Fleming reached around and snatched out his empty gun.

Stan straightened up and faced him, holding the flash beside him, the light still shining on the chain. "How much money did Crandall

promise you for your arson, Fleming? Don't you realize it's all gone now since you knifed him in bed, you murdering fool?" There was a touch of pity in Stan's eyes as he watched the wavering barrel of his own gun.

"So you saw him. I might have known—I did know, Mr. Private Eye. He tried to burn me to death. You saw that yourself. Well, with you gone there's plenty around this dump I can blame his murder on—"

"And what about Lafe Storrs, Fleming? Crandall might have been a grifter, but he couldn't stomach murder—that's why he decided to get rid of you, isn't it? Really tied you, when he was supposed to leave you loose enough to work yourself free. That's what they call the whipsaw, Fleming. Let you burn in the office instead of in the electric-chair. Well, Crandall's no great loss—but for getting Lafe Storrs, I'm really going to send you to Raiford and see that you fry!"

"A quarter of a million dollars!" Fleming's voice cracked into a squeal. "First Storrs getting in my way—then Crandall trying to cheat me of it—and now it's you. Well, damn you all, I say! Nobody's going to send me to Raiford—particularly you—"

He squeezed the trigger of the Colt. When the hammer clicked on an empty chamber, Fleming's face contorted into a horrible mask that grew more malign to look upon as he pulled the trigger five times more. Then, striking like a bushmaster with no warning, he pulled something else that nearly finished Stan—he lashed out with the heavy .45 and laid Stan's forehead open with the barrel of the gun.

Stan went over backward into the trough, and the grip of his long arms that took Fleming with him was purely automatic. The woods sent back a hollow echo of Fleming's frantic scream. He clawed at Stan's face, even pulled at his hair, and grabbed at the sides of the wooden trough until his hands were bloody with splinters.

Half-conscious and stunned, Stan tightened his grip on the only thing he had to hang on to—Fleming. Somewhere in the back of his mind he realized that they

were being carried along to certain destruction, and that nothing could stop the progress of that inexorable moving chain.

Like a douche of icy water the realization of death so near flooded over him and helped to clear his brain. He tried to heave and turn himself over to get the screaming Fleming underneath him. Fleming locked his legs around Stan's with a madman's strength.

"You're going with me! You're going with me!" Fleming screamed it over and over, again and again.

Stan doubled his fist, but there wasn't room in the narrow trough to deliver a knockout blow. With the edge of his hand he cracked the screaming Fleming on the back of the neck, using the same technique that had laid Hal Skelly low.

Fleming's screaming stopped and his legs relaxed. Stan rolled over on top of him—but he knew that his efforts had been too late. They had started over the end of the runway. Like the ten foot board that had balanced itself before meeting its end, both he and Fleming were going to go.

A flame of excruciating pain shot up through Stan from the base of his spine. Fleming slipped downward from beneath him.

Ka-choff!

Stan closed his eyes in a silent prayer. When they opened again he found himself dangling three feet below the end of the catwalk suspended by his belt from the hook in the end of a lumberman's peavy pole.

Clay Boland's solid muscles bulged as he hauled Stan up and laid him on the catwalk in safety. "I thought I'd better drop around and see what was goin' on when I seen a light in the mill." He spat tobacco over the flimsy catwalk rail. "Good thing, too. Another second and you'd'a been hamburger and sawdust."

Stan looked up at him feebly. "Hamburger? People used to call me Miles Standish Rice, the Hungry. After what I've seen today, Clay—I doubt like hell if I'll ever touch a piece of meat again!"

"There's always tobaccer 'n' moonshine," Clay Boland said. "Who wants to eat meat, anyway!"

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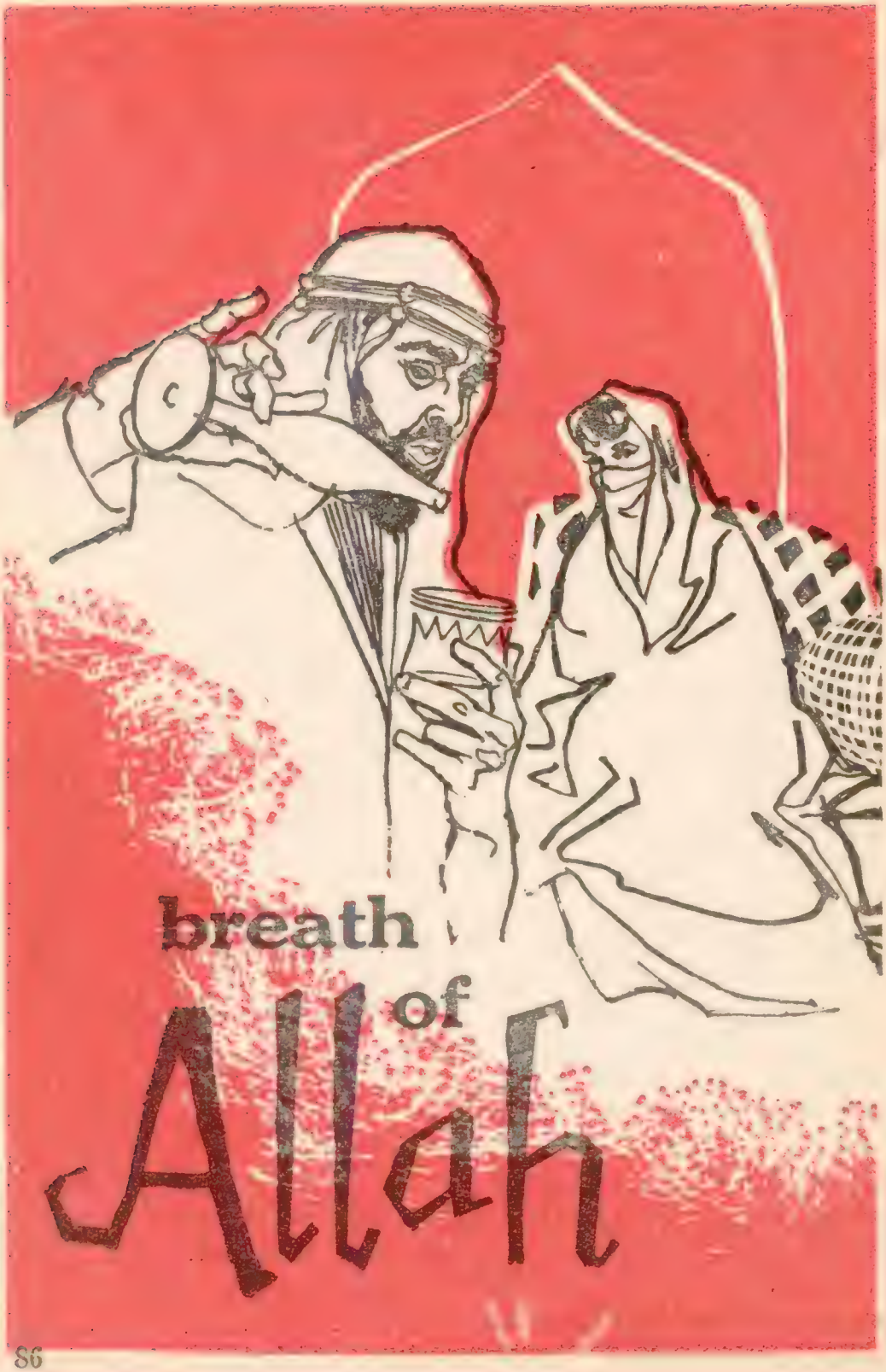
breath
of
Allah

FOR CLOSE upon a week I had been haunting the purlieus of the Muski, attired as a respectable dragoman, my face and hands reduced to a deeper shade of brown by means of a water-color paint (I had to use something that could be washed off and grease-paint is useless for purposes of actual disguise) and a neat black moustache fixed to my lip with spirit-gum. In his story *Beyond the Pale,* Rudyard Kipling has trounced the man who inquires too deeply into native life; but if everybody thought with Kipling we should never have had a Lane or a Burton and I should have continued in unbroken scepticism regarding the reality of magic. Whereas, because of the matters which I am about to set forth, for ten minutes of my life I found myself a trembling slave of the unknown.

Let me explain at once that my undignified masquerade was not prompted by mere curiosity or the quest of the pomegranate, it was undertaken as the natural sequel to a letter received from Messrs. Moses, Murphy and Co., the firm which I represented in Egypt, containing curious matters affording much food for reflection. "We would ask you," ran the communication, "to renew your inquiries into the particular composition of the perfume 'Breath of Allah,' of which you obtained us a sample at a cost which we regarded as excessive. It appears to consist in the blending of certain obscure essential oils and gum-resins; and the nature of some of these has defied analysis to date. Over a hundred experiments have been made to discover substitutes for the missing essences, but without success; and as we are now in a position to arrange for the manufacture of Oriental perfume on an extensive scale we should be prepared to make it *well worth your while* (the last four words characteristically underlined in red ink) if you could obtain for us a correct copy of the original prescription."

The letter went on to say that it was proposed to establish a separate company for the exploitation of the

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From: Sax Rohmer's TALES OF SECRET EGYPT. Reprinted by permission of Paul R. Reynolds & Son.

new perfume, with a registered address in Cairo and a "manufactory" in some suitably inaccessible spot in the Near East.

I pondered deeply over these matters. The scheme was a good one and could not fail to reap considerable profits; for, given extensive advertising, there is always a large and monied public for a new smell. The particular blend of liquid fragrance to which the letter referred was assured of a good sale at a high price, not alone in Egypt, but throughout the capitals of the world, provided it could be put upon the market; but the proposition of manufacture was beset with extraordinary difficulties.

The tiny vial which I had despatched to Birmingham nearly twelve months before had cost me close upon £100 to procure, for the reason that "Breath of Allah" was the secret property of an old and aristocratic Egyptian family whose great wealth and exclusiveness rendered them unapproachable. By dint of diligent inquiry I had discovered the *attar* to whom was entrusted certain final processes in the preparation of the perfume—only to learn that he was ignorant of its exact composition. But although he had assured me (and I did not doubt his word) that not one grain had hitherto passed out of the possession of the family, I had succeeded in procuring a small quantity of the precious fluid.

Messrs. Moses, Murphy and Co. had made all the necessary arrangements for placing it upon the market, only to learn, as this eventful letter advised me, that the most skilled chemists whose services were obtainable had failed to analyse it.

One morning, then, in my assumed character, I was proceeding along the Sharia el-Hamzawi seeking for some scheme whereby I might win the confidence of Mohammed er-Rahman the *attar*, or perfumer. I had quitted the house in the Darb el-Ahmar which was my base of operations but a few minutes earlier, and as I approached the corner of the street a voice called from a window directly above my head: "Saiyed! Saiyed!"

Without supposing that the

call referred to myself, I glanced up, and met the gaze of an old Egyptian of respectable appearance who was regarding me from above. Shading his eyes with a gnarled hand—

"Surely," he cried, "it is none other than Saiyed the nephew of Yussuf Khalig! *Es-selam 'aleykum, Saiyed!*"

"*Aleykum, es-selam,*" I replied, and stood there looking up at him.

"Would you perform a little service for me, Saiyed?" he continued. "It will occupy you but an hour and you may earn five piastres."

"Willingly," I replied, not knowing to what the mistake of this evidently half-blind old man might lead me.

I entered the door and mounted the stairs to the room in which he was, to find that he lay upon a scantily covered *diwan* by the open window.

"Praise be to Allah (whose name be exalted)!" he exclaimed, "that I am thus fortunately enabled to fulfil my obligations. I sometimes suffer from an old serpent bite, my son, and this morning it has obliged me to abstain from all movement. I am called Abdul the Porter, of whom you will have heard your uncle speak; and although I have long retired from active labor myself, I contract for the supply of porters and carriers of all descriptions and for all purposes; conveying fair ladies to the *hammam*, youth to the bridal, and death to the grave. Now, it was written that you should arrive at this timely hour."

I considered it highly probable that it was also written how I should shortly depart if this garrulous old man continued to inflict upon me details of his absurd career. However—

"I have a contract with the merchant, Mohammed er-Rahman of the Suk el-Attarin," he continued, "which it has always been my custom personally to carry out."

The words almost caused me to catch my breath; and my opinion of Abdul the Porter changed extraordinary. Truly my lucky star had guided my footsteps that morning!

"Do not misunderstand me," he added. "I refer not to the transport of his wares to Suez, to Zagazig, to Mec-

ca, to Aleppo, to Baghdad, Damascus, Kandahar, and Pekin; although the whole of these vast enterprises is entrusted to none other than the only son of my father: I speak, now, of the bearing of a small though heavy box from the great magazine and manufactory of Mohammed er-Rahman at Shubra, to his shop in the Suk el-Attarin, a matter which I have arranged for him on the eve of the Molid en-Nebi (birthday of the Prophet) for the past five-and-thirty years. Every one of my porters to whom I might entrust this special charge is otherwise employed; hence my observation that it was written how none other than yourself should pass beneath this window at a certain fortunate hour."

Fortunate indeed had that hour been for me, and my pulse beat far from normally as I put the question: "Why, O Father Abdul, do you attach so much importance to this seemingly trivial matter?"

The face of Abdul the Porter, which resembled that of an intelligent mule, assumed an expression of low cunning.

"The question is well conceived," he said, raising a long forefinger and wagging it at me. "And who in all Cairo knows so much of the secrets of the great as Abdul the Know-all, Abdul the Taciturn! Ask me of the fabled wealth of Karafa Bey and I will name you every one of his possessions and entertain you with a calculation of his income, which I have worked out in *nuss-faddah!** Ask me of the amber mole upon the shoulder of the Princess Aziza and I will describe it to you in such a manner as to ravish your soul! Whisper, my son"—he bent towards me confidentially—"once a year the merchant Mohammed er-Rahman prepares for the Lady Zuleyka a quantity of the perfume which impious tradition has called 'Breath of Allah.' The father of Mohammed er-Rahman prepared it for the mother of the Lady Zuleyka and his father before him for the lady of that day who held the secret—the secret which has belonged to the women of this family since the reign

* A **nuss-faddah** equals a quarter of a farthing.

of the Khalif el-Hakim from whose favorite wife they are descended. To her, the wife of the Khalif, the first *dirhem* (drachm) ever distilled of the perfume was presented in a gold vase, together with the manner of its preparation, by the great wizard and physician Ibn Sina of Bokhara (Avicenna)."

"You are well called Abdul the Know-all!" I cried in admiration. "Then the secret is held by Mohammed er-Rahman?"

"Not so, my son," replied Abdul. "Certain of the essences employed are brought in sealed vessels, from the house of the Lady Zuleyka, as is also the brass coffer containing the writing of Ibn Sina; and throughout the measuring of the quantities, the secret writing never leaves her hand."

"What, the Lady Zuleyka attends in person?"

Abdul the Porter inclined his head serenely.

"On the eve of the birthday of the Prophet, the Lady Zuleyka visits the shop of Mohammed er-Rahman, accompanied by an *imam* from one of the great mosques."

"Why by an *imam,* Father Abdul?"

"There is a magical ritual which must be observed in the distillation of the perfume, and each essence is blessed in the name of one of the four archangels; and the whole operation must commence at the hour of midnight on the eve of the Molid en-Nebi."

He peered at me triumphantly.

"Surely," I protested, "an experienced *attar* such as Mohammed er-Rahman would readily recognize these secret ingredients by their smell?"

"A great pan of burning charcoal," whispered Abdul dramatically, "is placed upon the floor of the room, and throughout the operation the attendant *imam* casts pungent spices upon it, whereby the nature of the secret essences is rendered unrecognizable. It is time you depart, my son, to the shop of Mohammed, and I will give you a writing making you known to him. Your task will be to carry the materials necessary for the secret operation (which takes place to-night) from the magazine of Mohammed er-Rahman at Shubra, to his shop

in the Suk el-Attarin. My eyesight is far from good, Said. Do you write as I direct and I will place my name to the letter."

The words "well worth your while" had kept time to my steps, or I doubt if I should have survived the odious journey from Shubra. Never can I forget the shape, color, and especially the weight, of the locked chest which was my burden. Old Mohammed er-Rahman had accepted my service on the strength of the letter signed by Abdul, and of course, had failed to recognize in "Saiyed" that Hon. Neville Kernaby who had certain confidential dealings with him a year before. But exactly how I was to profit by the fortunate accident which had led Abdul to mistake me for someone called "Saiyed" became more and more obscure as the box grew more and more heavy. So that by the time that I actually arrived with my burden at the entrance to the Street of the Perfumers, my heart had hardened towards Abdul the Know-all; and, setting my box upon the ground, I seated myself upon it to rest and to imprecate at leisure that silent cause of my present exhaustion.

After a time my troubled spirit grew calmer, as I sat there inhaling the insidious breath of Tonquin musk, the fragrance of Attar of roses, the sweetness of Indian spikenard and the stinging pungency of myrrh, opoponax, and ihlang-ylang. Faintly I could detect the perfume which I have always counted the most exquisite of all save one—that delightful preparation of Jasmine peculiarly Egyptian. But the mystic breath of frankincense and erotic fumes of ambergris alike left me unmoved; for amid these odors, through which it has always seemed to me that that of cedar runs thematically, I sought in vain for any hint of "Breath of Allah."

Fashionable Europe and America were well represented as usual in the Suk el-Attarin, but the little shop of Mohammed er-Rahman was quite deserted, although he dealt in the most rare essences of all. Mohammed, however, did not seek Western patronage, nor was there in the heart of the little

white-bearded merchant any envy of his seemingly more prosperous neighbors in whose shops New York, London, and Paris smoked amber-scented cigarettes, and whose wares were carried to the uttermost corners of the earth. There is nothing more illusory than the outward seeming of the Eastern merchant. The wealthiest man with whom I was acquainted in the Muski had the aspect of a mendicant; and whilst Mohammed's neighbors sold phials of essence and tiny boxes of pastilles to the patrons of Messrs. Cook, were not the silent caravans following the ancient desert routes laden with great crates of sweet merchandise from the manufactory at Shubra? To the city of Mecca alone Mohammed sent annually perfumes to the value of two thousand pounds sterling; he manufactured three kinds of incense exclusively for the royal house of Persia; and his wares were known from Alexandria to Kashmir, and prized alike in Stambul and Tartary. Well might he watch with tolerant smile the more showy activities of his less fortunate competitors.

The shop of Mohammed er-Rahman was at the end of the street remote from the Hamzawi (Cloth Bazaar), and as I stood up to resume my labors my mood of gloomy abstraction was changed as much by a certain atmosphere of expectancy—I cannot otherwise describe it—as by the familiar smells of the place. I had taken no more than three paces onward into the Suk ere it seemed to me that all business had suddenly become suspended; only the Western element of the throng remained outside whatever influence had claimed the Orientals. Then presently the visitors, also becoming aware of this expectant hush as I had become aware of it, turned almost with one accord, and following the direction of the merchants' glances, gazed up the narrow street towards the Mosque of el-Ashraf.

And here I must chronicle a curious circumstance. Of the Imam Abu Tabah I had seen nothing for several weeks, but at this moment I suddenly found myself thinking of that remarkable man. Whilst any mention of his name, or nickname—for I

could not believe "Tabah" to be patronymic—amongst the natives led only to pious ejaculations indicative of respectful fear, by the official world he was tacitly disowned. Yet I had indisputable evidence to show that few doors in Cairo, or indeed in all Egypt, were closed to him; he came and went like a phantom. I should never have been surprised, on entering my private apartments at Shepheard's, to have found him seated therein, nor did I question the veracity of a native acquaintance who assured me that he had met the mysterious *imam* in Aleppo on the same morning that a letter from his partner in Cairo had arrived mentioning a visit by Abu Tabah to el-Azhar. But throughout the native city he was kown as the Magician and was very generally regarded as a master of the *ginn*. Once more depositing my burden upon the ground, then, I gazed with the rest in the direction of the mosque.

It was curious, that moment of perfumed silence, and my imagination, doubtless inspired by the memory of Abu Tabah, was carried back to the days of the great *khalifs,* which never seem far removed from one in those mediaeval streets. I was transported to the Cairo of Harun al Raschid, and I thought that the Grand Wazir on some mission from Baghdad was visiting the Suk el-Attarin.

Then, stately through the silent group, came a black-robed, white-turbaned figure outwardly similar to many others in the bazaar, but followed by two tall muffled negroes. So still was the place that I could hear the tap of his ebony stick as he strode along the centre of the street.

At the shop of Mohammed er-Rahman he paused, exchanging a few words with the merchant, then resumed his way, coming down the Suk towards me. His glance met mine, as I stood there beside the box; and, to my amazement, he saluted me with smiling dignity and passed on. Had he, too, mistaken me for Saiyed—or had his all-seeing gaze detected beneath my disguise the features of Neville Kernaby?

As he turned out of the narrow street into the Ham-

zawi, the commercial uproar was resumed instantly, so that save for this horrible doubt which had set my heart beating with uncomfortable rapidity, by all the evidences now about me his coming might have been a dream.

Filled with misgivings, I carried the box along to the shop; but Mohammed er-Rahman's greeting held no hint of suspicion.

"By fleetness of foot thou shalt never win Paradise," he said.

"Nor by unseemly haste shall I thrust others from the path," I retorted.

"It is idle to bandy words with any acquaintance of Abdul the Porter's," sighed Mohammed; "well do I know it. Take up the box and follow me."

With a key which he carried attached to a chain about his waist, he unlocked the ancient door which alone divided his shop from the outjutting wall marking a bend in the street. A native shop is usually nothing more than a double cell; but descending three stone steps, I found myself in one of those cellar-like apartments which are not uncommon in this part of Cairo. Windows there were none, if I except a small square opening, high up in one of the walls, which evidently communicated with the narrow courtyard separating Mohammed's establishment from that of his neighbor, but which admitted scanty light and less ventilation. Through this opening I could see what looked like the uplifted shafts of a cart. From one of the rough beams of the rather lofty ceiling a brass lamp hung by chains, and a quantity of primitive chemical paraphernalia littered the place; old-fashioned alembics, mysterious looking jars, and a sort of portable furnace, together with several tripods and a number of large, flat brass pans gave the place the appearance of some old alchemist's den. A rather handsome ebony table, intricately carved and inlaid with mother-o'-pearl and ivory, stood before a cushioned *diwan* which occupied that side of the room in which was the square window.

"Set the box upon the floor," directed Mohammed, "but not with such undue

dispatch as to cause thyself to sustain an injury."

That he had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the box and was now burningly anxious to witness my departure, grew more and more apparent with every word. Therefore—

"There are asses who are fleet of foot," I said, leisurely depositing my load at his feet; "but the wise man regulateth his pace in accordance with three things: the heat of the sun; the welfare of others; and the nature of his burden."

"That thou hast frequently paused on the way from Shubra to reflect upon these three things," replied Mohammed, "I cannot doubt; depart, therefore, and ponder them at leisure, for I perceive that thou art a great philosopher."

"Philosophy," I continued, seating myself upon the box, "sustaineth the mind, but the activity of the mind being dependent upon the welfare of the stomach, even the philosopher cannot afford to labor without hire."

At that, Mohammed er-Rahman unloosed upon me a long pent-up torrent of invective—and furnished me with the information which I was seeking.

"O son of a wall-eyed mule!" he cried, shaking his fists over me, "no longer will I suffer thy idiotic chatter! Return to Abdul the Porter, who employed thee, for not one *faddah* will I give thee, calamitous mongrel that thou art! Depart! For I was but this moment informed that a lady of high station is about to visit me. Depart! lest she mistake my shop for a pig-sty."

But even as he spoke the words, I became aware of a vague disturbance in the street, and—

"Ah!" cried Mohammed, running to the foot of the steps and gazing upwards, "now am I utterly undone! Shame of thy parents that thou art, it is now unavoidable that the Lady Zuleyka shall find thee in my shop. Listen, offensive insect—thou art Saiyed, my assistant. Utter not one word; or with this"—to my great alarm he produced a dangerous-looking pistol from beneath his robe—"will I blow a hole through thy vacuous skull!"

Hastily concealing the pis-

tol, he went hurrying up the steps, in time to perform a low salutation before a veiled woman who was accompanied by a Sudanese servant-girl and a negro. Exchanging some words with her which I was unable to detect, Mohammed er-Rahman led the way down into the apartment wherein I stood, followed by the lady, who in turn was followed by her servant. The negro remained above. Perceiving me as she entered, the lady, who was attired with extraordinary elegance, paused, glancing at Mohammed.

"My lady," he began immediately, bowing before her, "it is Saiyed my assistant, the slothfulness of whose habits is only exceeded by the impudence of his conversation."

She hesitated, bestowing upon me a glance of her beautiful eyes. Despite the gloom of the place and the *yashmak* which she wore, it was manifest that she was good to look upon. A faint but exquisite perfume stole to my nostrils, whereby I knew that Mohammed's charming visitor was none other than the Lady Zuleyka.

"Yet," she said softly, "he hath the look of an active young man."

"His activity," replied the scent merchant, "resideth entirely in his tongue."

The Lady Zuleyka seated herself upon the *diwan,* looking all about the apartment.

"Everything is in readiness, Mohammed?" she asked.

"Everything, my lady."

Again the beautiful eyes were turned in my direction, and, as their inscrutable gaze rested upon me, a scheme—which, since it was never carried out, need not be described—presented itself to my mind. Following a brief but eloquent silence—for my answering glances were laden with significance:—

"O Mohammed," said the Lady Zuleyka indolently, "in what manner doth a merchant, such as thyself, chastise his servants when their conduct displeaseth him?"

Mohammed er-Rahman seemed somewhat at a loss for a reply, and stood there staring foolishly.

"I have whips for mine," murmured the soft voice. "It is an old custom of my family."

Slowly she cast her eyes in

my direction once more.

"It seemed to me, O Saiyed," she continued, gracefully resting one jeweled hand upon the ebony table, "that thou hadst presumed to cast love-glances upon me. There is one waiting above whose duty it is to protect me from such insults. Miska!"—to the servant girl—"summon El-Kimri (The Dove)."

Whilst I stood there dumbfounded and abashed the girl called up the steps:

"El-Kimri! Come hither!"

Instantly there burst into the room the form of that hideous negro whom I had glimpsed above; and—

"O Kimri," directed the Lady Zuleyka, and languidly extended her hand in my direction, "throw this presumptuous clown into the street!"

My discomfiture had proceeded far enough, and I recognized that, at whatever risk of discovery, I must act instantly. Therefore, at the moment that El-Kimri reached the foot of the steps, I dashed my left fist into his grinning face, putting all my weight behind the blow, which I followed up with a short right, utterly outraging the pugilistic proprieties, since it was well below the belt. El-Kimri hit the dust to the accompaniment of a human discord composed of three notes—and I leaped up the steps, turned to the left, and ran off around the Mosque of el-Ashraf, where I speedily lost myself in the crowded Ghuriya.

I spent the remainder of the forenoon at my house in the Darb el-Ahmar heaping curses upon my own fatuity and upon the venerable head of Abdul the Know-all. At one moment it seemed to me that I had wantonly destroyed a golden opportunity, at the next that the seeming opportunity had been a mere mirage. With the passing of noon and the approach of evening I sought desperately for a plan, knowing that if I failed to conceive one by midnight, another chance of seeing the famous prescription would probably not present itself for twelve months.

There are some who have criticized me harshly in regard to my commercial activities at this time, and none of my affairs has provoked greater acerbitude than that

of the perfume called "Breath of Allah." Yet I am at a loss to perceive wherein my perfidy lay; for my outlook is sufficiently socialistic to cause me to regard with displeasure the conserving by an individual of something which, without loss to himself, might reasonably be shared by the community. For this reason I have always resented the way in which the Moslem veils the faces of the pearls of his *harem*. And whilst the success of my present enterprise would render the Lady Zuleyka the poorer, it would enrich and beautify the world by delighting the senses of men with a perfume more exquisite than any hitherto known.

Such were my reflections as I made my way through the dark and deserted bazaar quarter, following the Sharia el-Akkadi to the Mosque of el-Ashraf. There I turned to the left in the direction of the Hamzawi, until, coming to the narrow alley opening from it into the Suk el-Attarin, I plunged into its darkness, which was like that of a tunnel, although the upper parts of the houses above were silvered by the moon.

I was making for that cramped little courtyard adjoining the shop of Mohammed er-Rahman in which I had observed the presence of one of those narrow high-wheeled carts peculiar to the district, and as the entrance thereto from the Suk was closed by a rough wooden fence I anticipated little difficult in gaining access. Yet there was one difficulty which I had not foreseen, and which I had not met with had I arrived, as I might easily have arranged to do, a little earlier. Coming to the corner of the Street of the Perfumers, I cautiously protruded my head in order to survey the prospect.

Abu Tabah was standing immediately outside the shop of Mohammed er-Rahman!

My heart gave a great leap as I drew back into the shadow, for I counted his presence of evil omen to the success of my enterprise. Then, a swift revelation, the truth burst in upon my mind. He was there in the capacity of *imam* and attendant at the mystical "Blessing of the perfumes"! With cautious tread I retraced my steps,

circled round the Mosque and made for the narrow street which runs parallel with that of the Perfumers and into which I knew the courtyard beside Mohammed's shop must open. What I did not know was how I was going to enter it from that end.

I experienced unexpected difficulty in locating the place, for the height of the buildings about me rendered it impossible to pick up any familiar landmark. Finally, having twice retraced my steps, I determined that a door of old but strong workmanship set in a high, thick wall must communicate with the courtyard; for I could see no other opening to the right or left through which it would have been possible for a vehicle to pass.

Mechanically I tried the door, but, as I had anticipated, found it to be securely locked. A profound silence reigned all about me and there was no window in sight from which my operations could be observed. Therefore, having planned out my route, I determined to scale the wall. My first foothold was offered by the heavy wooden lock which projected fully six inches from the door. Above it was a crossbeam and then a gap of several inches between the top of the gate and the arch into which it was built. Above the arch projected an iron rod from which depended a hook; and if I could reach the bar it would be possible to get astride the wall.

I reached the bar successfully, and although it proved to be none too firmly fastened, I took the chance and without making very much noise found myself perched aloft and looking down into the little court. A sigh of relief escaped me; for the narrow cart with its disproportionate wheels stood there as I had seen it in the morning, its shafts pointing gauntly upward to where the moon of the Prophet's nativity swam in a cloudless sky. A dim light shone out from the square window of Mohammed er-Rahman's cellar.

Having studied the situation very carefully, I presently perceived to my great satisfaction that whilst the tail of the cart was wedged under a crossbar, which retained it in its position, one of the shafts was in reach of my hand.

Thereupon I entrusted my weight to the shaft, swinging out over the well of the courtyard. So successful was I that only a faint creaking sound resulted; and I descended into the vehicle almost silently.

Having assured myself that my presence was undiscovered by Abu Tabah, I stood up cautiously, my hands resting upon the wall, and peered through the little window into the room. Its appearance had changed somewhat. The lamp was lighted and shed a weird and subdued illumination upon a rough table placed almost beneath it. Upon this table were scales, measures, curiously shaped flasks, and odd-looking chemical apparatus which might have been made in the days of Avicenna himself. At one end of the table stood an alembic over a little pan in which burnt a spirituous flame. Mohammed er-Rahman was placing cushions upon the *diwam* immediately beneath me, but there was no one else in the room. Glancing upward, I noted that the height of the neighboring building prevented the moonlight from penetrating into the courtyard, so that my presence could not be detected by means of any light from without; and, since the whole of the upper part of the room was shadowed, I saw little cause for apprehension within.

At this moment came the sound of a car approaching along the Sharia esh-Sharawani. I heard it stop, near the Mosque of el-Ashraf, and in the almost perfect stillness of those tortuous streets from which by day arises a very babel of tongues I heard approaching f o o t s t e p s. I crouched down in the cart, as the footsteps came nearer, passed the end of the courtyard abutting on the Street of the Perfumers, and paused before the shop of the Mohammed er-Rahman. The musical voice of Abu Tabah spoke and that of the Lady Zuleyka answered. Came a loud rapping, and the creak of an opening door: then—

"Descend the steps, place the coffer on the table, and then remain immediately outside the door," continued the imperious voice of the lady. "Make sure that there are no eavesdroppers."

Faintly through the little

window there reached my ears a sound as of some heavy object being placed upon a wooden surface, then a muffled disturbance as of several persons entering the room; finally, the muffled bang of a door closed and barred... and soft footsteps in the adjoining street!

Crouching down in the cart and almost holding my breath, I watched through a hole in the side of the ramshackle vehicle that fence to which I have already referred as closing the end of the courtyard which adjoined the Suk el-Attarin. A spear of moonlight, penetrating through some gap in the surrounding buildings, silvered its extreme edge. To an accompaniment of much kicking and heavy breathing, into this natural limelight arose the black countenance of "The Dove." To my unbounded joy I perceived that his nose was lavishly decorated with sticking-plaster and that his right eye was temporarily off duty. Eight fat fingers clutching at the top of the woodwork, the bloated negro regarded the apparently empty yard for a space of some three seconds, ere lowering his ungainly bulk to the level of the street again. Followed a faint "pop" and a gurgling quite unmistakable. I heard him walking back to the door, as I cautiously stood up and again surveyed the interior of the room.

Egypt, as the earliest historical records show, has always been a land of magic, and according to native belief it is to-day the theater of many super-natural dramas. For my own part, prior to the episode which I am about to relate, my personal experiences of the kind had been limited and unconvincing. That Abu Tabah possessed a sort of uncanny power akin to second sight I knew, but I regarded it merely as a form of telepathy. His presence at the preparation of the secret perfume did not surprise me, for a belief in the efficacy of magical operations prevailed, as I was aware, even among the more cultured Moslems. My scepticism, however, was about to be rudely shaken.

As I raised my head above the ledge of the window and looked into the room, I perceived the Lady Zuleyka seated on the cushioned

diwan, her hands resting upon an open roll of parchment which lay upon the table beside a massive brass chest of antique native workmanship. The lid of the chest was raised, and the interior seemed to be empty, but near it upon the table I observed a number of gold-stoppered vessels of Venetian glass and each of which was of a different color.

Beside a brazier wherein glowed a charcoal fire, Abu Tabah stood; and into the fire he cast alternately strips of paper bearing writing of some sort and little dark brown pastilles which he took from a sandalwood box set upon a sort of tripod beside him. They were composed of some kind of aromatic gum in which benzoin seemed to predominate, and the fumes from the brazier filled the room with a blue mist.

The *imam,* in his soft, musical voice, was reciting that chapter of the Koran called "The Angel." The weird ceremony had begun. In order to achieve my purpose I perceived that I should have to draw myself right up to the narrow embrasure and rest my weight entirely upon the ledge of the window. There was little danger in the maneuver, provided I made no noise; for the hanging lamp, by reason of its form, cast no light into the upper part of the room. As I achieved the desired position I became painfully aware of the pungency of the perfume with which the apartment was filled.

Lying there upon the ledge in a most painful attitude, I wriggled forward inch by inch further into the room, until I was in a position to use my right arm more or less freely. The preliminary prayer concluded, the measuring of the perfumes had now actually commenced, and I readily perceived that without recourse to the parchment, from which the Lady Zuleyka never once removed her hands, it would indeed be impossible to discover the secret. For, consulting the ancient prescription, she would select one of the gold-stoppered bottles, unscrew it, direct that so many grains should be taken from it, and never removing her gaze from Mohammed er-Rahman whilst he measured out the correct

quantity, would restopper the vessel and so proceed. As each was placed in a wide-mouthed glass jar by the perfumer, Abu Tabah, extending his hands over the jar, pronounced the names:

"Gabrail M i k a i l, Israfil, Israil."

Cautiously I raised to my eyes the small but powerful opera-glasses to p r o c u r e which I had gone to my rooms at Shepheard's. Focussing them upon the ancient scroll lying on the table beneath me, I discovered, to my joy, that I could read the lettering quite well. Whilst Abu Tabah began to recite some kind of incantation in the course of which the names of the Companions of the Prophet frequently occurred, I commenced to read the writing of Avicenna.

"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the High, the Great...."

So far had I proceeded and no further when I became aware of a curious change in the form of the Arabic letters. They seemed to be moving, to be cunningly changing places one with another as if to trick me out of grasping their meaning!

The illusion persisting, I determined that it was due to the unnatural strain imposed upon my vision, and although I recognized that time was precious I found myself compelled temporarily to desist, since nothing was to be gained by watching these letters which danced from side to side of the parchment, sometimes in groups and sometimes singly, so that I found myself pursuing one slim Arab A (*'Alif*) entirely up the page from the bottom to the top where it finally disappeared under the thumb of the Lady Zuleyka!

Lowering the glasses I stared down in stupefaction at Abu Tabah. He had just cast fresh incense upon the flames, and it came home to me, with a childish and unreasoning sense of terror, that the Egyptians who called this man the Magician were wiser than I. For whilst I could no longer hear his voice, I now could *see* the words issuing from his mouth! They formed slowly and gracefully in the blue clouds of vapour some four feet above his head, revealed their meaning to me in letters of gold, and then faded away to-

wards the ceiling!

Old-established beliefs began to totter about me as I became aware of a number of small murmuring voices within the room. They were the voices of the perfumes burning in the brazier. Said one, in a guttural tone:

"I am Myrrh. My voice is the voice of the Tomb."

And another softly: "I am Ambergris. I lure the hearts of men."

And a third huskily: "I am Patchouli. My promises are lies."

My sense of smell seemed to have deserted me and to have been replaced by a sense of hearing. And now this room of magic began to expand before my eyes. The walls receded and receded, until the apartment grew larger than the interior of the Citadel Mosque; the roof shot up so high that I knew there was no cathedral in the world half so lofty. Abu Tabah, his hands extended above the brazier, shrank to minute dimensions, and the Lady Zuleyka, seated beneath me, became almost invisible.

The project which had led me to thrust myself into the midst of this feast of sorcery vanished from my mind. I desired but one thing: to depart, ere reason utterly deserted me. But, to my horror, I discovered that my muscles were become rigid bands of iron! The figure of Abu Tabah was drawing nearer; his slowly moving arms had grown serpentine and his eyes had changed to pools of flame which seemed to summon me. At the time when this new phenomenon added itself to the other horrors, I seemed to be impelled by an irresistible force to jerk my head downwards: I heard my neck muscles snap metallically: I *saw* a scream of agony spurt forth from my lips... and I saw upon a little ledge immediately below the square window a little *mibkharah,* or incense burner, which hitherto I had not observed. A thick, oily brown stream of vapor was issuing from its perforated lid and bathing my face clammily. Sense of smell I had none; but a chuckling, demoniacal voice spoke from the *mibkharah,* saying—

"I am *Hashish!* I drive men mad! Whilst thou hast lain up there like a very fool, I have sent my vapors to thy

brain and stolen thy senses from thee. It was for this purpose that I was set here beneath the window where thou couldst not fail to enjoy the full benefit of my poisonous perfume..."

Slipping off the ledge, I fell.. and darkness closed about me.

My awakening constitutes one of the most painful recollections of a not uneventful career; for, with aching head and tortured limbs, I sat upright upon the floor of a tiny, stuffy, and uncleanly cell! The only light was that which entered by way of a little grating in the door. I was a prisoner; and, in the same instant that I realized the fact of my incarceration, I realized also that I had been duped. The weird happenings in the apartment of Mohammed er-Rahman had been hallucinations due to my having inhaled the fumes of some preparation of *hashish,* or Indian hemp. The characteristic sickly odor of the drug had been concealed by the pungency of the other and more odoriferous perfumes; and because of the position of the censer containing the burning *hashish,* no one else in the room had been affected by its vapor. Could it have been that Abu Tabah had known of my presence from the first?

I rose, unsteadily, and looked out through the grating into a narrow passage. A native constable stood at one end of it, and beyond him I obtained a glimpse of the entrance hall. Instantly I recognized that I was under arrest at the Bab el-Khalk police station!

A great rage consumed me. Raising my fists I banged furiously upon the door, and the Egyptian policeman came running along the passage.

"What does this mean, *shawesh?*" I demanded. "Why am I detained here? I am an Englishman. Send the superintendent to me instantly."

The policeman's face expressed alternately anger, surprise, and stupefaction.

"You were brought here last night, most disgustingly and speechlessly drunk, in a cart!" he replied.

"I demand to see the superintendent."

"Certainly, certainly, *effendim!*" cried the man, now thoroughly alarmed. "In an

instant, *effendim!*"

Such is the magical power of the word "Inglisi" (Englishman).

A painfully perturbed and apologetic native official appeared almost immediately, to whom I explained that I had been to a fancy dress ball at the Gezira Palace Hotel, and, injudiciously walking homeward at a late hour, had been attacked and struck senseless. He was anxiously courteous, sending a man to Shepheard's with my written instructions to bring back a change of apparel and offering me every facility for removing my disguise and making myself presentable. The fact that he palpably disbelieved my story did not render his concern one whit the less.

I discovered the hour to be close upon noon, and, once more my outward self, I was about to depart from the Place Bab el-Khalk, when, into the superintendent's room came Abu Tabah! His handsome ascetic face exhibited grave concern as he saluted me.

"How can I express my sorrow, Kernaby Pasha," he said in his soft faultless English, "that so unfortunate and unseemly an accident should have befallen you? I learned of your presence here but a few moments ago, and I hastened to convey to you an assurance of my deepest regret and sympathy."

"More than good of you," I replied. "I am much indebted."

"It grieves me," he continued suavely, "to learn that there are footpads infesting the Cairo streets, and that an English gentleman may not walk home from a ball safely. I trust that you will provide the police with a detailed account of any valuables which you may have lost. I have here"—thrusting his hand into his robe—"the only item of your property thus far recovered. No doubt you are somewhat short-sighted, Kernaby Pasha, as I am, and experience a certain difficulty in discerning the names of your partners upon your dance programme."

And with one of those sweet smiles which could so transfigure his face, Abu Tabah handed me my opera-glasses!

GOD'S ugly bride

THE LONG narrow jury room was hot and fetid, reeking with sweat, stale tobacco smoke and the fumes of cheap whiskey smuggled in by a Court attendant susceptible to bribes. Outside, gusts of wind blew occasional flurries of flaky snow against the panes of the high narrow windows. Ira Parsons sat huddled in his big chair, his thin lips set in a stubborn line, his hands clasping the arms of the chair. Sweat beaded his forehead, made ugly stains beneath his armpits, but he wouldn't ask to have a window opened. He wouldn't give Hodge that satisfaction.

Will Hodge wasn't paying any attention to him. The stocky red-faced farmer stood spraddle-legged by the window, peering out across the city streets to the harbor where the dull gray waters of the Ohio River moved sluggishly down stream. Parsons didn't have to go to the window to envision Hodge's view. Cincinnati in 1852 was in its "Golden Age", a restless turbulent city five times the size of Chicago, twice that of Cleveland, and growing fast. There would be knots of men in the Courthouse Park, Parsons knew, caught up in the frenzy of fear and hatred engendered by the city's first sensational murder trial, men who would be roused to violence by anything less than the death penalty for the woman accused of quadruple murder.

Hodge swung away from the window and stamped across the room. He swayed in front of Parsons, thumbs looped in his galluses, his face thrust forward. Parsons braced himself against the farmer's bull-like bellow and was surprised when his tones were wheedling. "What's the matter with you, Ira? Do you think you can bring us all around to your way of thinking? We could all be in our own beds tonight if you weren't a-holdin' us up. It's eleven to one, Ira, and Judge Carter won't hear of no drawn jury. We'll be here 'til Hell freezes unless you give in."

"I'm right, Will. You know I'm right."

"I don't know nothin' of the sort. The lawyer feller's woven a charm about you with his fancy words and his Eastern ways."

"A woman's life is at stake."

"A woman, you say. A

witch out of hell, I calls her. And she's the gall to call herself the Bride of God."

"Isn't that proof she's insane?"

"Crazy or not, she's got to swing. She bought arsenic, didn't she. Cool as you please, she marches into Salter's drugstore and pitches the old man a story about needing to get rid of rats. And then she dumps the stuff into little Jimmy Forrest's soup. Jimmy was only eight, his brother Johnnie only two. You ain't got no kids, Ira, but you must have some feelings. You must know what's right and what's wrong."

Parsons' eyes slid beyond Hodge to where O'Donnell stood. The Irish store-keeper had voted with him on the first day to acquit Nancy Farrer by reason of insanity. But now O'Donnell's round face was void of expression.

"Will's right," the Irishman said slowly, "the temper of the town being what it is, they'll lynch the girl if we set her free. But there's more than that. They'll boycott us all. They'll drive us out of Cincinnati, you and me both, Ira."

Parsons shut his eyes and his fingers clamped down harder over the wooden arms of the chair. For two days he'd withstood the battering of his fellow jurymen but how long could a man hold out, even when he was sure he was right? And Parsons wasn't sure. In his own mind he had no doubt that Nancy Farrer had committed murder. But was she an imbecile as her lawyer so fervently stated, incapable of knowing right from wrong? If so, and Parson's vote helped to send her to the gollows, would he not be a murderer too?

A tremor shook Parson's slender frame. He looked up at Hodge. "Give me a little time, Will."

"We been at it for two days. Court closes in half an hour and if we don't go in, we'll be cooped up another night."

"Don't try to force me." Parsons' voice was tremulous and there was pleading in his gray eyes.

Hodge gave an angry grunt but he turned away and strode to the window. Parsons rested his head on the table, cradling his face with his arms.

The high-lights of the ten day trial formed pictures in his mind as vivid as reality.

He saw Nancy Farrer standing in the witness box, dressed all in black except for the cheap white cotton shirtwaist. As Will Hodge had said, she was ugly as sin and yet her very ugliness gave her an appealing quality, an ugliness so extreme that it verged on beauty. Her eyes were set wider apart than any Parsons had ever seen—a full four inches. Her coiled hair was black and sleek; the eyebrows formed a straight line across her low broad forehead. Her nose was flattened at the end with gaping nostrils. Her mouth was enormous, the lips unnaturally red. Her figure and her walk were ungainly but there was something voluptuous in the firm, heavy breasts and the white column of her throat that stirred Parsons more than he wished to admit. A visiting lawyer had described Nancy as "A cross between the god Jupiter and a Mississippi catfish." The description had circulated through the Court and into the jury box. It fitted Nancy and yet it left something unsaid.

Most of the facts relating to Nancy's crimes were not in dispute. Nancy was eighteen. She had arrived in Cincinnati two years earlier with her mother, a Mormon missionary who had set up a "temple" near the docks. From the beginning the mission was doomed to failure. Meeting after meeting was broken up by yelling, hooting mobs. The Farrer women were pelted with stones, sticks or snowballs when they appeared on the streets. After a year Mrs. Farrer gave up and disappeared from the city, leaving her daughter behind. Nancy had attempted to continue with the services. Dressed in white, she publicly proclaimed herself "the Bride of God." The few who bothered to listen hooted in derision or smeared her white robes with mud. The "temple" was closed for non-payment of rent and Nancy, alone and without funds, took the only employment offered her, that of becoming a servant to an elderly widow, Mary Anne Green.

Nancy entered Mrs. Green's service in August of 1851. Two weeks later, Nancy purchased five cents worth of arsenic at the apothecary shop of William Salter, located at No. 80 Broadway. Mr. Salter, after inquiring her reason for

the purchase, wrapped the arsenic in brown paper and warned Nancy to burn the wrapping after the arsenic was used. Two witnesses observed the transaction and none of those involved noted anything unusual in Nancy's manner.

Four days after the arsenic had been bought, Mary Anne Green lay dead. Her death was certified to have been caused by cholera, of which there was an epidemic in Cincinnati. Subsequently her body was exhumed and lethal quantities of arsenic found. Nancy told her lawyer that she had purchased the arsenic at the behest of Mrs. Anne Brazilli, a cook in the Green household and that Mrs. Brazilli had shown her how to mix the poison in hot soup in such a way as not to arouse suspicion.

In October of the same year, Nancy found fresh employment as nursemaid in the home of a wealthy merchant. There were five members in the household: Elisha Forrest, his wife Cassandra and their three sons aged eight, six and two. Shortly after assuming her duties, Nancy paid a visit to another apothecary, Edward Seandlier, whose shop was in Fulton Street. Again she made a purchase of five cents worth of white arsenic. As in the first case, it was wrapped in brown paper. The very next day all of the members of the Forrest family fell ill. Their sickness was characterized by nausea, stomach cramps, excessive thirst and vomiting. As in the case of Mrs. Green, doctors ascribed these attacks to cholera. All of the Forrests recovered except Cassandra who had been suffering from a prolonged illness. She was buried exactly one week after Nancy Farrer entered her employ.

No suspicion fell upon Nancy. With the death of Mrs. Forrest Nancy became all-important to the household. The children adored her and she appeared to be devoted to them. On the last day of November, Nancy appeared at Mr. Forrest's office, wild-eyed and distraught, to tell him that all three of the children had been taken ill.

Forrest summoned a doctor and rushed to his home. Shortly after his arrival the youngest boy, John Edward, succumbed to the paroxysms.

The other boys were given medical care and seemed to improve. Forrest sat up with his sons until four o'clock in the morning. He took the younger of the two, William, into his bedroom and left James Wesley, who was eight, under Nancy's care. About seven in the morning, Forrest was awakened by James' screams. He hurried to fetch the doctor. Before he could return James was also dead.

The family doctor was no longer satisfied that the deaths were natural. He called in a colleague and, after examining the bodies, they informed Forrest that death had been caused by arsenic administered in small doses over a prolonged period of time. Nancy edged into the room while their conversation was going on and, after Forrest had ordered her out, he discovered her listening at the door. Her behavior at this time, added to the fact that she alone in the household had not suffered from the poison was enough to convince Forrest of her guilt. He searched her room and found a strip of brown paper dropped behind the door. Particles of white powder, later proven to be arsenic, still adhered to the paper.

Nancy was promptly arrested and charged with all four murders. The date of her trial for the murder of James Wesley Forrest was set for February 19, 1852. As she was without funds the Court appointed a local lawyer named Read to defend her. On the day the trial was scheduled, however, Read was too intoxicated to appear in her behalf. By chance a young attorney had appeared in Judge Carter's Court earlier that morning on an unrelated case. The judge, who had been favorably impressed, persuaded him to act for Nancy Farrer for which service he would receive the fee of seventy-five dollars. It was this man whose brilliant defense of a seemingly hopeless case had so deeply moved Ira Parsons.

Actually the lawyer was not completely unknown to Parsons prior to the trial. Parsons, a clerk in a warehouse, had aspirations to become a writer. On occasion he attended a literary club of which the lawyer, whom he knew as Rudy, was a member. Rudy was a man to command attention. Tall, handsome,

red-haired, with piercing blue eyes and a melifluous voice, he could hardly be missed. What set Rudy apart, in Parsons' eyes, was that the fledgling lawyer had a dream of new horizons in which America would become the leader of the world in art, literature, law and government and that Cincinnati would become the hub of his new world. This was a dream which Parsons shared and he clung to Rudy's every word.

The Courtroom drama was marked by the youth of its principals. Peter McGroarty, who substituted for the district attorney who was ill, was still in his twenties, the defendant was eighteen and Rudy twenty-eight. McGroarty hammered home the state's case with skill and precision. The facts could not be denied and Rudy made little attempt to do so. Instead he built up a defense that was hitherto almost unknown in the annals of American courtroom procedure, that of "moral imbecility."

He pointed out that Nancy Farrer had benefited in no way from the deaths of her victims. She had not borne a grudge against any of them. Indeed she had shown a deep attachment to the Forrest children and they for her. Why then had she killed them? The only reason that could be found was that she had been impelled by motives outside herself, too powerful for her to resist and too difficult for her to understand. Strangely enough the concepts of modern psychiatry were inveighed long before its technical jargon came into existence.

The most telling witness for the defense was Dr. J. R. Buchanan, a phrenologist and craniologist. Dr. Buchanan spoke in terms that the jury, composed largely of laborers, farmers and clerks, could understand.

"I have examined the defendant's head," he declared, "and it is one of the most defective I have ever seen. As to her general moral character, I should say, from all indications of brain and temperament, that she is capable of being deceitful and reserved but not capable of being a great criminal, except through imbecility. The general tone of her brain favors imbecility. Idiocy sometimes exists with remarkable special talents but

in the case of the defendant I would stake my life she is a moral idiot. I should think she was an object for compassion rather than for punishment."

The jury had been impressed by Professor Buchanan's ponderous, almost pontifical manner until McGroarty, red-faced and shaking with anger, had sprung to his feet and faced Buchanan.

"Nancy Farrer knew that arsenic was poison, did she not?"

Buchanan reluctantly admitted that she did.

"And she knew that if she put poison in a child's soup, it would kill that child?"

"Yes, she understood that."

"Then she knew the nature of her act and that it was wrong."

"With her intellect perhaps. But morally she was an imbecile."

McGroarty swung around to the jury. He shrugged and spread his hands in a gesture of exasperation. "She knew but she didn't know. What kind of pother have we here?"

At that moment Parsons' eyes had swung from one to another of his fellow jurymen. On some of their faces he saw amusement or contempt. In others mild resentment. They were simple, hard-working men, detemined to be guided by common sense and not to be misled by long words or complicated ideas.

Then the lawyer for the defense rose, tall and calm, his slight Harvard accent a little too smooth for the crude Courthouse. Parsons soon forgot about the jury, even his own role in the trial as he was swept away by the young lawyer's arguments.

Rudy's voice remained level, his manner easy as though talking to a group of friends. Nancy Farrer, he said, was the victim of hereditary insanity. Her father, he disclosed, was a drunkard who had died of delirium tremens and her mother was a Mormon prophetess who had taught the girl from earliest childhood that she was to be the bride of God. Hated, stoned and pilloried by the community, Nancy had finally been abandoned and fórced to become a household drudge in the home of Mary Anne Green. And here by chance, her "imbecility was educated to a criminal act" by Anne Brazilli, the Italian cook. Mrs.

Brazilli, the lawyer contended, had directed the first purchase of arsenic and had then shown Nancy how to use it.

"Nancy Farrer had no intent to kill, no understanding of the nature of her act. She was impelled by an irresistible and wholly irrational wish to see the effects of poison, to produce death as a symbol of her newly-found, God-like power. She was no longer a woman but a piece of mechanism, neither capable of self-control, nor of asserting the true laws of her being against this foreign influence.

"The prisoner bore no malice toward James Wesley Forrest. She loved him and was devoted to him. She gained nothing by his death. She herself was like a child, fully unconscious of the consequences of her acts but irrationally curious about the strange power which had been placed in her hands."

The speech had been long and Parsons had not understood all of it. Now sitting in the fetid jury room with his head in his arms, he found that there was much that he could not remember, yet its framework remained clear. He was aware that this was a test of reason against prejudice, that a wedge had been entered to open up a deeper understanding of mankind. He could make the breach wider or close it down. But he did not have the lawyer's gift of language, his persuasive manner, his knowledge and tact. He stood alone with eleven men pitted against him and no one to guide him. All that his stubbornness could gain was a few hours of delay.

He pushed himself up, ready to give voice to his defeat. A draft of cold, fresh air swept across him. Hodge had finally opened one of the windows. From outside a babble of voices arose and a few hoarse cries. A crash echoed throughout the room. A stone, big as a man's fist, struck hard against the wooden frame of the window, then fell to the floor with a clatter. Parsons saw the piece of crumpled paper wrapped about it.

Hodge scooped up the stone, peeled off the paper and straightened it out on the table top with the flat of his hand. His face grew redder as he read the scrawled words. He lumbered across to Par-

sons and thrust the wrinkled foolscap into his hands.

"Hang the Mormon bitch or we'll string you all up."

Hodge's face was so close to Parsons' that the clerk was sprayed with his spittle. "What do you say now, damn you? Must we all pay for your acting the fool?"

Parsons' mouth was dry and when he tried to rise his knees felt as though they had turned to water but from some inner resources he found a new strength.

"I'll not be threatened, Will."

Hodge's fingers twisted in the clerk's shirt front and he thrust him back hard against the wall. "I've had enough of your tomfoolery. By God, the woman is guilty as hell."

His fist swung back in a wide arc. Parsons struggled to free himself. Then before Hodge could strike, O'Donnell was between them, clinging to Hodge's arm.

"Leave him be," O'Donnell ordered mildly. "Let me talk to the boy. He'll come around, won't you, Ira?"

Hodge's arm dropped slowly to his side, then he walked back to the window, flung it wide open and shouted to the crowd. "Don't worry, boys. We'll stretch her ugly neck."

Parsons could hear the cheers and then the window slammed shut. He looked at O'Donnell. The Irishman said, "Use your head, Ira. You can't fight this alone."

Parsons twisted about. "I've got to have more time. What can a man do when he knows he's right and everyone's against him?"

O'Donnell shrugged and said, "You give in and wait until the next time."

Parsons didn't give in that night. The following morning at his insistence the jury filed into the Courtroom twice to ask Judge Carter to repeat his definition of imbecility. It did no good. The rest of the jury was adamant. At every vote, the count was eleven to one. Finally, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Parsons capitulated.

Once the verdict was rendered, the jury was dismissed but Parsons returned to the Court the next day when Judge Carter passed sentence on Nancy Farrer. With a feeling of horror, he listened to the heavily intoned words: "The sentence of the Court is that you, Nancy Farrer, be

conveyed from this place to the jail of Hamilton County, there to remain in confinement until Friday, the twenty-fifth of June, next, thence to be conveyed to the place of execution in the yard of said jail, and there, between the hours of eleven in the forenoon and three in the afternoon be hanged by the neck until you shall be dead, and may God have mercy on your soul."

The crowd which the day before had clamored for the Mormon girl's blood was suddenly h u s h e d as though frightened by the accomplishment of the very act which they had demanded. Some of the women wept openly in pity and there was a catch in Judge Carter's voice as he spoke the final words.

Nancy stood still, smiling a foolish little smile, without any apparent awareness of what had happened. Her lawyer took his place beside her and announced that he would file an appeal. The crowd melted slowly away and Parsons went with them, pacing the cold raw streets in mental anguish until he found a saloon where he tried to drown his sense of guilt.

The temper of the city veered toward compassion. Petitions circulated throughout Cincinnati asking for the commutation of Nancy Farrer's s e n t e n c e. Thousands signed. But as time went on, hope faded. Twice writs of appeal were denied by the Superior Court and Governor Wood made it clear that he had no intention of intervening in Nancy's behalf.

Parsons continued to drink. He no longer went to meetings of the literary club for fear of seeing Rudy face to face. Then one night as he was returning to his lodging house near the docks, he stumbled, fell and was unable to rise from his drunken stupor. As he lay there, someone knelt beside him. An arm raised him up, helped him to his feet. Parsons stared wild-eyed into the handsome, strong-boned face of the young lawyer whom he had sought to avoid.

Rudy, who had spent the earlier part of the evening addressing a temperance meeting, helped Parsons to his room, steadying him as he mounted the rickety stairs and easing him onto his bed. The youthful clerk babbled

almost incoherently but then, as he grew a little more sober, he poured out the whole story of what had happened in the jury room including the smuggled whiskey which had helped to while away the jurymen's time, the rock which had been thrown in the window, Will Hodge's conversation with the mob outside.

Rudy's polite attention shifted to tense excitement. He stayed with Parsons until the clerk fell asleep and he was still at his bedside in the morning. After breakfast, he rushed Parsons to his office and secured a sworn statement from him. This statement formed the basis for a new appeal. Three days after it was filed, a re-trial was granted.

The date for the re-trial was set for April 2nd. The place was the State Courthouse in Columbus. This time when the Court assembled, the crowd was even greater than it had been in Cincinnati. But this was no blood-thirsty mob demanding vengeance. The brilliant defence of Nancy Farrer had been reported in newspapers throughout the country and the youthful lawyer's name was on the lips of men and women who had not known of his existence a few months before. Lawyers, statesmen, students and idealistic men and women from all walks of life flocked into Columbus from a dozen states to listen while the young lawyer opened up fresh avenues of understanding into the mysteries that surround the criminally insane.

Ira Parsons quit his job in Cincinnati to attend the trial. Each day he sat in the front row, listening in rapt attention to the man who was now his friend. From time to time Rudy turned to smile at him or exchange a few words. As the trial advanced it became clear that Rudy was not pleading only for Nancy Farrer's life but for a deeper, more meaningful interpretation of the law that would serve the interests of humanity.

During each recess, the young lawyer was surrounded by reporters and asked to amplify his statements. The Cincinnati Enquirer proclaimed the defense "the most brilliant ever heard in this state" and predicted that the man who conducted it could look forward to a "distinguished career." At the close

of the trial the jury was out for only three hours and returned with a vedict of "not guilty by reason of insanity." The loud cheers of the crowd had to be quelled by Judge Warren's gavel. When quiet was restored, he directed the Court that Nancy Farrer should be removed from prison immediately and transferred to the asylum for the insane at Lick Run, Ohio.

Ira Parsons waited across the street from the Courthouse in the hope of congratulating his friend. But when the tall young lawyer appeared at the head of the stairs, an admiring crowd, spear-headed by reporters, converged upon him, blocking off Parsons' view. As the clerk drew near, the crowd parted, leaving Rudy on the top step with only one man beside him.

Parsons recognized this man for he was a well-known political figure of the day, Edward F. Noyes, who was soon slated to become United States Senator from Ohio. Noyes slipped an arm about Rudy's shoulder, then with a gesture of his hand that commanded silence, he cried out, "Gentlemen, I give you the future governor of Ohio."

Many years later, Noyes was to use the same gesture and almost the same words upon addressing the Republican National Convention held in Cincinnati in 1876. This time Noyes stood on the platform beside the man who had sprung to fame through his defense of Nancy Farrer, a man who was now bearded and gray, and shouted to the assembly, "Gentlemen, I give you the next President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes."

Footnote: Nancy Farrer did not stay long in Lick Run. After a few months she was transferred to an asylum in Longview. Here she was in much demand as a nurse and was given the run of the institution. One day she simply wandered off the grounds and disappeared. No documentary evidence exists to prove that she was ever seen or heard from again. Strangely enough on the night before Nancy's disappearance, Ira Parsons was reported to have been knocked into the Ohio River during a drunken brawl and presumably drowned. His body was never recovered. From time to time, Cincinnatians who returned from Salt Lake City spread rumors that they had seen Nancy Farrer in a Mormon temple there and that she was accompanied by a short, slender, bearded man who somehow looked vaguely familiar.

THE saint's RATINGS

On a midnight —

dark and rain filled. Walking through the empty streets, I met a thin man in a tall hat. It was Edgar Allen Poe. His ghost, of course. "Ah," he said. "A fellow practitioner of the delicate art of the mystery. Do you fellows still write all those code and cypher stories, in Gold Bug style?" "Nevermore!" I croaked. "Ah yes," he answered, "Times must change. Still . . . you do enjoy yourselves with tales of gothic horrors, night's dark fears . . .?" "Nevermore!" I sighed. He controlled himself well, only by the slightest tremor did I decine his true mind. "Still the basics must be there . . ." He smiled, showing too many teeth. "The powers of the mind, deduction, analysis . . ." "Nevermore!!" I sobbed. "But don't let it trouble you, Mr. Poe. After all — you're dead!" It was then that he slipped away into the night, his parting words were mixed with the raindrops and only half heard. I may be wrong — but I think he said, "And damn glad I am too. . . ."

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

★ ★ ★ ★ Four stars: Outstanding

★ ★ ★ Three stars: Above Average

★ ★ Two stars Passable reading

★ One star: For the ash can

LEGACY OF A SPY, by Henry S. Maxfield (Crest, 35¢)
Here are the international spies in the classic tradition, only they are hard at work in the world today. Though the story suffers from repetition and too much soul-searching by the hero, the balance is more than evened by the stark reality of action and setting. ★ ★ ★

WAKE UP AND SCREAM, by Milton K. Ozaki (Gold Medal, 25¢)
Just at the point where you are dozing off to sleep, a neat and unexpected switch jars the story alive, giving it enough inertia to finish without dying. ★ ★

PROWLER IN THE NIGHT, by Jack Matcha (Gold Medal, 25¢)
The crimes and detection of a mad sex-strangler. Though many of the clues are too obvious, interest is still tuned to a fine pitch. ★ ★

MURDER ON HER MIND, by Vechel Howard (Gold Medal, 25¢)
Though there is plenty of flavor here of old Mexico, something is needed besides local color. The story is like a lot of Mexican dishes — plenty of beans, but only scraps of meat. ★

HOMICIDE IS MY GAME, by Stephen Marlowe (Gold Medal, 25¢)
Not mine. ★

THE KINGDOM OF JOHNNY COOL, by John McPartland (Gold Medal, 25¢)
A perfect book — to hold up the short leg of the table. ★

THE HAUNTED STRANGLER, by John C. COOPER (Ace, 35¢)
A very funny book. Too bad it's supposed to be serious. ★

ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF MYSTERIES

by VERONICA PARKER JOHNS,

New York Regional Vice President,
Mystery Writers of America

The year 1959 marks the 150th birthday anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe, the 100th of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. To commemorate this happy coincidence and to honor these two progenitors of the mystery novel and, incidentally, to sell more books, MWA is inaugurating an annual FESTIVAL OF MYSTERIES.

The final week of October, (October 26 through 31) the one in which Hallowe'en appropriately falls, is when we propose to toss modesty to the winds and clamour for public attention. To that end, bookshops, large and small, and libraries, public and infinitesimal, will be urged to compete for prizes in two categories:

A) Window Display which, in the opinion of the judges, most strikingly presents the mystery as a prime form of entertainment.

B) Interior Display, ditto.

To back up the contestants we shall strive for all possible coverage by newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Book publishers, a sampling of this group indicates, will cooperate fully with us, each other, store owners and librarians in putting across the message.

Festival weeks must have slogans; ours, though not necessarily in these precise words, must convey the point that PEOPLE WHO KNOW —READ MYSTERIES.

The week will be simultaneously celebrated in all four chapters: New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, with the respective Regional Vice Presidents serving as Festival Chairman. Each of these may bite off as large an area as he feels he can chew.

A word as to mechanics, necessarily brief as many of them are yet to be invented:

judging of the displays will be done from photographs, submitted as early in the Festival Week as possible, plus actual viewing of the finalists where feasible and deemed necessary.

The prize will be a scroll, or a placque, or a medal. In addition to this, Veronica Parker Johns would like to go on record as favoring a Perpetual Challenge Trophy, to be known, perhaps, as The Hemlock Cup, to be kept at National Headquarters until such time as any contestant scores his third victory, thereby retiring it. I believe that this is necessary to ensure repeated participation, whereas many contestants might feel another scroll hardly worth the effort.

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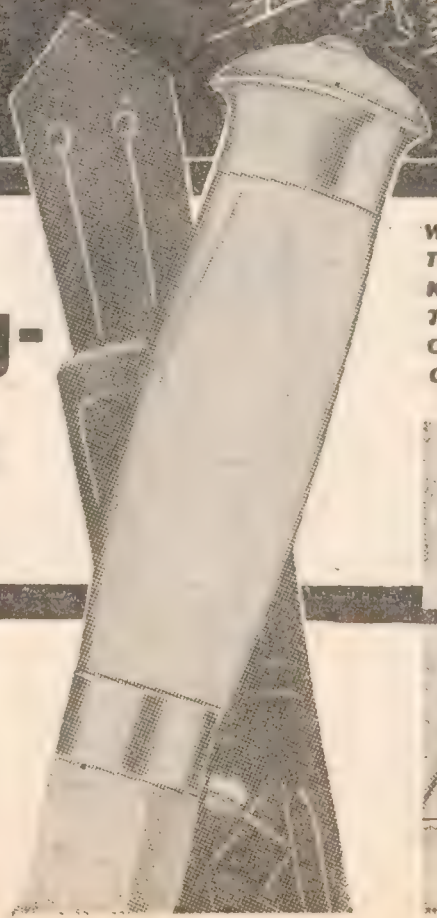

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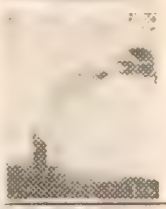

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"I have already had two of your famous knives. I think they are very good knives, and they do everything it says it does in the magazine." J.F.R., Mount Vernon, Indiana.

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WHAT'S NEW IN CRIME

by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

John W. Vandercook calls Andrew Garve's A HERO FOR LEANDA (Harper, $2.95) "a most agreeable and readable yarn" and I really don't disagree though some readers (and here I emphatically do *not* quote Mr. V.) may feel there is a disturbing resemblance between Alexander Kastella, political leader of the liberation movement in Spyros, and the political leader of another predominantly Greek-speaking island who was also deported, not too long ago, to an island in the Indian Ocean... If we, however, ignore this (ahem!) coincidence, the portrait of Kastella assumes some validity in its own right, and Mike Conway and Leanda Sophoulis become simply two agreeable people who have a fantastic adventure and survive to sail on to still further adventures..... Do read this.

It is dangerously easy to dismiss John Creasey as a latter-day Alexandre Dumas (a compliment when you consider how Dumas' novels still live today), and as "incredibly prolific". But to do this is to ignore Creasey's ability to create characters who do not move with *papier-mache* exactness before another *papier-mache* curtain, but are instead living vivid ALIVE men and women whose fortunes and whose mis-fortunes, whose successes and whose vicissitudes are credible—and never boring. You are again conscious of this in THE TROUBLE AT SAXBY'S (Harper, $2.95), originally published in England, in somewhat different form, as FIND INSPECTOR WEST, —as Chief Inspector West gambles his career and his future on his judgement of a situation. Do read this.

Ian Fleming's GOLDFINGER (Macmillan, $3.00), is Fleming's latest novel about James Bond, "connoisseur of wine and cuisine, catnip to

women" (to quote one reviewer) *and* Number 007 in the British Secret Service. Mr. Bond hunts—and eventually disposes of—an incredible master criminal in this rather incredible novel which takes you, at one point, among the extremely incredible higher echelons of organized crime in this country. You are left mildly amazed that they did climb that high up.. I am afraid I found it all a little difficult to read, though I *did* find the transformation of Pussy Galore most fascinating....

It had to happen!

There are two ways—no, three ways—of discussing the beatniks. They can be immortalized in comic strips, or laughed at as an isolated social phenomena, ignoring the attractiveness to the irresolute of this cult of rejection of Society, *and* they can be analyzed, through solemn academic bifocals, by men and by women who, in so doing, give dignity to a negativist philosophy.

And you can write a mystery novel around a group of these escapists, as George Bagby does in his amusing THE REAL GONE GOOSE (Doubleday, $2.95) where poor Bagby, fascinated in a dry sort of way by "the real gone goose", finds it difficult to explain his relations with the girl—once she has been murdered—to Inspector Schmidt, and even to himself. Do read this.

Poul Anderson's PERISH BY THE SWORD (Macmillan, $2.95), winner of Macmillan's Cock Robin Mystery Award, introduces Trygve Yamamura, a detective whom you will meet in next month's *Saint*. An extremely able job. Do read this.

Tommy Hambledon, schoolmaster turned Intelligence agent, returns in a Manning Coles trilogy, THE EXPLOITS OF TOMMY HAMBLEDON (Doubleday, $3.95). A reissue of DRINK TO YESTERDAY, the superb A TOAST TO TOMORROW (where Hambledon serves for some time as Nazi chief of police), and ALIAS UNCLE HUGO, the book should be welcomed by all Hambledon adherents.

Beautifully literate Nicholas Blake takes apart an interesting personality in A PEN KNIFE IN MY HEART (Harper, $2.95). You may not agree with the publishers that "this is a novel of horror—one that will keep

the reader tensely on the edge of his chair" (this reader is usually too tired for that....), but I imagine we have all known—or known of—men like Stuart Hammer. Do read this if you haven't done so already!

Amber Dean's SOMETHING FOR THE BIRDS (Doubleday, $2.95) should be studied by prospective bank robbers and its lessons taken to heart.... Do *not* mail the proceeds to yourself to a small town in upstate New York—or to any small town anywheres! Watch out for well-meaning postmistresses and—this is particularly important—watch out for dedicated bird watchers! Do read this!

Ed McBain's detectives of the 87th Precinct are, to quote Anthony Boucher, "collectively, the most successful series detective created in the 1950's." In a further example of the trend towards trilogies, Simon and Schuster have just published, for the first time in hardcovers, the first three cases of these detectives who work out of the "87th" Precinct. THE 87th PRECINCT (Simon and Schuster, $3.95), contains COP HATER, THE MUGGER and THE PUSHER, all three examples of the problems faced by just such a precinct.

Ed McBain's detectives—his cops, if you prefer—Steve Carella and the others—are realistic, believable, thoroughly human and often likable. In other words, they are people, and *not* caricatures! This is particularly important in these days when so many among us have a tendency to generalize, or shrug our shoulders fatalistically at some headlines, and to take for granted that these headlines apply to an entire profession (and it *is* a profession, after all) on whose moral strength may depend our survival as a community!

Ludovic Travers, personification of urbane upper middleclass England, returns in Christopher Bush's 52nd detective novel, THE CASE OF THE RUNNING MAN (Macmillan, $2.95). The author's effort, a deliberate one, to introduce characters "either American or with American interests", succeeds moderately well as Travers runs into some decidedly unpleasant people in his wanderings as he hunts the person responsible for the death of William Weddall.

— Continued from Back Cover

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